

Incidents and leaders interaction within the movie history essay



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This paper analyses the theories and concepts of leadership of key characters in the movie, *Invictus*. The key characters analysed are President Nelson Mandela and Francois Pienaar, captain of the South African rugby team.

Based on a book written by John Carlin, *Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game That Changed a Nation*, the movie is directed by award-winning director Clint Eastwood. Starring Morgan Freeman as President Nelson Mandela and Matt Damon plays Francois Pienaar, who is the current captain of the Springboks, the South African rugby team, it was released in the United States in mid-December 2009.

2. 0 SYNOPSIS OF MOVIE

Storyline

The story centres around events before and during the 1995 Rugby World Cup, hosted in South Africa shortly after the fall of apartheid with the release of political prisoner Nelson Mandela. Mandela was held in a prison on Robben Island for close to 27 years. As the new elected President, Mandela vowed to unite the South Africa population which is currently divided into two groups: the white people who originated from Europe and came to South African in the seventeenth century known as Afrikaners and the native black population of the country. The movie basically shows President Mandela's attempt to unite both groups in supporting the country's rugby team, the Springboks (rugby was traditionally a white sport) and steering the team as it made a historic drive towards winning the 1995 Rugby World Cup Championship.

Despite all odds and initial resistance, the black natives of South Africa soon began to show interest in the Springboks. As the team wins more and more games, they continue to receive rising support from both the Afrikaners and the black natives. The team achieved unexpected success in the 1995 Rugby World Cup final, defeating the strongest opponent in the tournament, New Zealand, which brought cheer not only to the Afrikaners but also to the black natives all over the country as they celebrated the team's victory. This inevitably began to bridge the divide between the two groups that had been there for centuries due to apartheid.

The title *Invictus* is translated from the Latin as undefeated or unconquered, and is the title of a poem by English poet William Ernest Henley (1849-1903). The ending saw the recitation of verses from the poem:

“ Out of the night that covers me, Black as the pit from pole to pole,

I thank whatever gods may be For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Under the bludgeonings of chance my head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears Looms but the Horror of the shade,

And yet the menace of the years Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.”

Leaders in the movie

There are clearly two distinguished leaders in the movie:

President Nelson Mandela – despite having to face other pressing issues to build the country in his first term as president, Mandela is committed to his pledge to reunite the people of South Africa. He tries to achieve this through sports, namely rugby in which the country is hosting in the following year.

Francois Pienaar, captain of the Springboks (South African Rugby team).

Pienaar faces a tough challenge from President Mandela to drive his team to win the 1995 Rugby World Cup Championship, something he never thought possible before.

Role of leaders

Newly-elected President Nelson Mandela plays a leading role as the person who tries to unite the divided groups of white Afrikaners and the black South African natives with the end of apartheid. He believes that it can be achieved through rugby, which is the number one sport for the white Afrikaners. With his strong belief in the power of the game, Mandela went against the wishes of his own staff and follows his instincts to pursue his target.

Mandela calmly leads by example, displaying great leadership skills through his quiet reflective confidence in contemplating decisions, his commitment to achieve whatever he sets out to do and the way he touches other peoples' lives and emotions with his personal communication style.

Meanwhile, Francois Pienaar admires President Mandela's aspirations to unite the people of South Africa and was inspired by his dedication and

perseverance to achieve his goal. Through his leadership and commitment, Pienaar steadily builds his team's confidence and began to win more and more matches, and eventually brought his team to victory against the strongest opponent, New Zealand, in the final match of the 1995 Rugby World Cup.

3. 0 LEADERSHIP ASPECTS

Incidents within the movie involving the leaders

One incident shows a sporting organization where all committee members are black natives, and they agree to pass a motion to change the name, colour and logo of the rugby team to suit a different and blacker South Africa. Currently, the rugby team represents the pride of the Afrikaners and is despised by the black natives as they see it as a symbol of apartheid. However, President Mandela who arrives at the meeting just after the voting process asks the committee members to rethink their decisions in the context of unity for the country and the good of the population. In the end, he manages to gather 13 votes on his side which is enough for him to keep the Springboks.

Mandela's style of participative leadership is very admirable. He always encourages those working under him to think differently about surrounding issues. A good example would be the one concerning his personal security group. Instead of being suspicious about the loyalty and commitment of his white security staff, he directed the security head, a black Soth African native, to work together with their highly experienced counterparts and learn

from them. He also treats the white security staff well even though some of them were against him when he was in prison.

Days before the final match, Pienaar as captain of the rugby squad claims that the team needs a break. They head to Robben Island with their girlfriends to take their minds off the game. There, Pienaar visited the jail where Mandela was held. Standing inside Mandela's actual jail cell, Pienaar is dismayed to discover how small the cell is and with nothing to sleep on except a thin sheet on the bare ground. Yet the man who was held in this cell for nearly 26 years can easily forgive those who put him in prison, and has great plans to unite the people of the country.

Incidents and leaders' interaction within the context of the movie

President Mandela invites Pienaar to tea for their first meeting. Mandela believes that he can achieve the unity that he planned for through rugby and needed Pienaar's assistance to get the support of the Afrikaners. Pienaar was charmed by Mandela's personal style and warmth upon his arrival at the Government House. He also observed that Mandela treated everyone around him with great respect, even the lady who served them tea.

During the brief meeting, Mandela skillfully challenges Pienaar to think positively about winning the upcoming Rugby World Cup Championship. He shared his vision on the importance of winning the championship to South Africa – to unite the people via a World Cup victory. Pienaar who was impressed with the president's quiet leadership, personal commitment and motivation to achieve the vision soon began to see the odds of winning the

cup as a possibility, thus inspires him to lead this team to train harder than before.

Leaders' behaviour and characteristics

In this movie, Mandela skillfully demonstrates his people-oriented leadership style. For instance, even on his first day in office as the newly-elected President of South Africa, he showed great courtesy to all his staff, blacks and whites, by greeting and smiling at everybody whom he passed by on his way to his suite. This earned him great respect from all staff, especially the white Afrikaners who thought they would be sacked once a black leader assumed office.

Mandela also decided to maintain the former white staff and builds an administrative team of both groups. The same also applies to his security staff. In order to lead by example and to achieve the unity he had long planned for, he believes that his team must reflect his vision.

4. 0 DESCRIPTION AND DISCUSSION OF LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR

Leadership behaviour

Leadership styles are important to successfully lead teams in organisations. There are various styles of leadership that can be observed and are practised by leaders in today's organisations, but theories mostly centre these two:

The first group displays task-oriented behaviours, whereby the leader only manages the daily activities of his subordinates towards accomplishing a task which was predetermined.

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The second set involves people-oriented behaviour, also known as participative leadership. Leaders in this group normally provide a supportive role by encouraging his subordinates to get involved in decision making on the project that they are working on. This results in a positive work environment which increases productivity of the team as they feel that they are part of the decision making process and thus “ own” the project.

Evidently, both sets of behaviours are important to create a balance in successful leadership. President Mandela excellently displayed both task-oriented and participative leadership styles in his quest to build the nation. He sought the help and participation of Pienaar to transform the image of the Springboks in the eyes of the black natives. Through Pienaar’s leadership, the team members successfully won the hearts of the black natives and garner their support which steered the team to victory.

Change agent capabilities

Basically, a “ change agent” is someone who can motivate others around him to produce higher degree of output, to do more and to achieve better things in their lives.

Change agents require emotional intelligence to ensure people are totally engaged in a project. People who are highly supportive of the purpose and are highly committed to achieve the objectives of the project will contribute to better productivity and chances of meeting the goals and objectives are maximised. A change agent needs to have high competencies in soft skills, namely excellent people and communication skills, to encourage people’s involvement and minimise resistance. He or she must be able to reach out to

the inner values and beliefs of the people involved in the project in order to implement change with the people.

Clearly, President Mandela has demonstrated his capabilities in becoming the “change agent” for South Africa’s unity and progress. President Mandela demonstrates these managerial traits effectively through leading by example and motivating people through his great respect for others and personal humility. His quietly confident manner and strong commitment in conveying his visions and aspirations also encourage others around him to do amazing things that they never thought they are capable of doing before.

Able to support, able to develop new ideas and recognize achievement

Despite the hostility shown towards his support for the Springboks, President Mandela stood his ground and diligently and courageously attended the rugby matches. He even made an effort to memorise the names of all the players and greeted them personally by their name before the matches and during practices.

In order to promote foreign investment in building South Africa’s economy with is also laden with issues, Mandela administrative team tries to ensure that President Mandela receives wide press coverage whenever he meets with other world leaders to discuss bilateral relationships.

5.0 IDENTIFICATION AND EXPLANATION OF INCIDENTS

Executive summary of the two incidents selected.

President Mandela read the news concerning the upheaval in management of the Springboks team after he assumes the new position. He started to devise how to unite the people of South Africa and saw rugby as the vehicle that might work to bridge the divide. He understands that most Afrikaners are afraid of losing their identity when a black leader becomes president of the country and that the Springboks rugby team is traditionally very important to the white population. He then decides to use the Springboks as a means to unite the population and the upcoming Rugby World Cup Championship as the event that will bring them together. Later when Mandela came to know that a sports committee which comprised all black members voted to change the identity of the rugby team by changing the name, logo and colour of the Springboks to reflect a new and “blacker” South Africa, he personally hurried to attend the meeting and asked the committee members to rethink their decisions and explain the implications that their decisions might bring onto the unity of the South African population. He managed to get a small following of 13 votes on his side; however, the small majority was enough to keep the Springboks intact. He then forges ahead with his plan to unite the black and white population through rugby.

Pienaar also does his part to support President Mandela’s commitment to unite the people of South Africa and instill pride in his teammates towards a united country. In his first attempt to get the message across, Pienaar tries to make his team actually sing the South African national anthem by giving

them copies of the anthem's lyrics. However, his teammates show clear disinterest and merely scrunch up their copies. Later, they are forced by the President to take occasional breaks from rugby and go out into the poorer areas of South Africa and teach rugby to the natives as a way to inculcate interest of the game to the black natives. At first, only Chester who is the team's sole black player is welcomed by the black children but eventually, after many attempts, the whole team is accepted by the rural population. The team then willingly help introduce the sport to a new generation of children and instil national pride, regardless of race.

Involvement of the selected leaders within the incident

In the first incident, President Mandela takes it upon himself to make sure that the Springboks are able to maintain their name, logo and colours despite disagreement from the black sports committee members. He stood his ground and clearly conveyed the message across that what he did was for the good of the country's unity.

In the second incident, Pienaar tried to change the attitude of the team players towards embracing their national anthem. Even though he was not successful on his first attempt, the fact that he went on to sing the anthem displayed his willingness to lead by example, hoping that the others will follow suit.

Making decision within team, group and individual setting

A strategic leader has a team of decision makers to help him reach a consensus when making important decisions. This process of decision-

making improves the quality of the decisions, especially when developing crucial planning and policies affecting the country.

A strategic leader needs a competent team to support his role. Coupled with his knowledge and skills, a strategic leader can lead a team of high performing individuals to create and develop strategic vision and plans utilising available resources and implementing national policies. Due to the complexity of today's world economy and global issues, a strategic leader of a nation requires the assistance of a forward-looking team of executives to forge ahead with his plans to achieve his vision.

Charismatic and transformational roles

There are very few leaders who are capable of transformational leadership. However, this is not considered unfortunate as a leader's ultimate job is to keep the organization productive and the people engaged. In certain instances, too much transformation can be chaotic and lead nowhere.

In this movie, Mandela was one of the few who can be categorized as a successful transformational leader. He was able to encourage people to believe in themselves so that the organisation can achieve greater heights. For instance, in his first meeting with Pienaar, Mandela explains that a leader's job is to get followers to believe that they are capable of doing more than they think possible. This thinking then leads to the rugby team's victory in winning the World Cup Championship.

Leaders with these types of behaviours and attitudes tend to draw followers as people are naturally attracted to those who display strength and inspire belief in others. These charismatic qualities enable effective leadership.
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6. 0 Critically analyze each of the two and more incidents and consider other options

the leaders could have considered and made.

Participative leadership, delegation and empowerment

Participative leadership style, which is known to be the best type of corporate leadership style in organisations today, allows employees to get involved in decision-making process to a certain extent. This democratic style of employee management creates healthy relationship between management and employees as both sides feel that their involvement is sought in the process of achieving the organization's goals and objectives.

This leadership technique also promotes the development of future leaders via their participation in determining a common goal for the organization. As involvement of team members are required in decision making, hidden talents can be unearthed and their leadership qualities polished further.

In the first incident, President Mandela asserts his decision to let the Springboks keep their identity but at the same time asks the committee members to reconsider their decision. Although he managed to persuade a small minority (13 votes) to agree with him, the number is sufficient and he looks upon it as a small win, not a total defeat. This displays his participative leadership style whereby instead of using his power and influence to change the committee's decision, he asked them to rethink their decision and get them to vote again.

For the second incident involving Pienaar, as captain of the team he tried to persuade the other members to sing along the national anthem. However,

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when the team crushed the paper given to them, he did not reprimand them but went on to sing the anthem. He tried to lead by example, hoping that the team would follow suit once they see him doing so. In encouraging the team to work harder towards achieving their goal of winning the World Cup Championship, Pienaar was seen motivating his team members so that they can all work towards one purpose and perform their best in every match. Pienaar also uses participative leadership to inculcate team spirit and camaraderie.

Power and influence

“ Power refers to the capacity a person has to influence the decision of another person so that the person acts according to his wishes. The more power a person has, the higher his influence on the whole system is.”

Meanwhile, influence causes a change in the attitude or behaviour of others and is more of a process which guides the people’s activities towards appropriate directions in meeting management objectives that have been set.

As the President of the country, Mandela has both power and influence. However, he skillfully uses his power and influence to generate respect and support from the people.

Pienaar also steadily works his way up to gain trust and respect from his fellow teammates. By commanding their trust and respect, he was capable of transforming the perception of the rugby team and instill pride and higher commitment from them.

Managerial traits and skills

President Mandela and Pienaar both demonstrate high level of management skills and leadership traits which help them gain support from a population which are initially plagued by centuries of racial divide. Mandela inspirational leadership motivates Pienaar to perform better than he ever thought he could. Through Mandela's quiet self-confidence and charisma, Pienaar was overwhelmed and personally look upon him as a great leader. Based on this motivation, Pienaar encouraged his rugby team to work harder and strive for victory.

Leading change

Mandela's first meeting with Francois Pienaar displays some important leadership lessons. When Pienaar was asked by Mandela on his leadership philosophy, he answers that he believes in leading by example. Mandela concurs with him that leading by example is crucial. In response to another question on how Pienaar inspires people, he affirms that people are inspired through the heart and by what they see.

Strategic leadership

Strategic leadership refers to leaders who successfully influence large groups of people in organisations to act as required based on established organisational structure, allocated resources and communicated objectives and vision. They are generally functional in a highly complex environment which is influenced by external factors beyond their control.

Strategic leaders have to digest information quickly and make correct decisions based on whatever is available to them at the point in time. As

such, consequences of their decision affect more people in the organisation and tend to commit more resources. Sometimes, the decisions and initiatives can only implicate long-term plans and may take years to prepare and execute.

Ethical issues

In this movie, President Mandela transforms the perception of the black natives on rugby which has always been a white sport. Traditionally, the black natives despise the Springboks which they perceive as representing apartheid. By changing the values through this game, Mandela fruitfully changed the tradition of the population as all of them showed great unison in supporting the rugby team as they made their way to victory.

Another example of good value that is displayed in this movie is when President Mandela took over the office of President. Although the white Afrikaner staff thought that they will be asked to leave their jobs when a black leader becomes president of the country, they are surprised when President Mandela asked them to continue working as usual and keep them as part of his administrative team. Although Mandela was subjected to a lot of grievances during the apartheid era, he shows strength of character when he does not display vindictiveness towards the white population. Yet he is able to forgive them and concentrate on uniting the racial divide.

7.0 CONCLUSION

In summary, the movie *Invictus* is full of great examples of leadership skills and values. President Mandela exhibited excellent leadership and management skills in bringing unity to the country through sports and

Pienaar successfully executed his part to garner the nation's support to an overwhelming victory.

Clearly, participative leadership and empowerment through consensus and general consultation brings better results compared to exertion of power and influence to move a population. The excellent examples depicted throughout the movie indicate the strength of characters of both President Nelson Mandela and Francois Pienaar. Their strengths shone through when presented by challenges upon challenges as they work their way to realising a united South African population.

Charismatic leaders with strong commitment and high confidence can transform the impossible into a possibility and create huge success for the organisation. President Mandela displays his charisma as he successfully attracts followers, who initially disagree with his principles, into participating in activities towards achieving his vision. He effectively nurtures their emotions and encourages their hearts to work towards building the unity and accept differences among them as strengths and think positively for a better South Africa.