

Gandhi's character and leadership style



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Below analysis of case study from movie “ Gandhi” is based on life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. M. K. Gandhi after a successful fight against indiscrimination in South Africa devoted rest of his life to lead India to freedom. In the forthcoming sections detailed leader profile of M. K. Gandhi based on observations will be generated. Different leadership aspects, principles, effectiveness, and styles used by Gandhiji in his fight for the independence of India will be demonstrated. Also, part of focus will be the reaction of followers and peers on a very different perspective of leadership and its impact on British Empire. Entire analysis is supported by existing theories, research evidences and empirically grounded data about leadership.

Leadership concepts

According to Yukl (2010) “ Leadership can be defined as the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives”. Movie “ Gandhi” based on M. K Gandhi’s life over the length has very well depicted the various dimensions and aspects of leadership. It portrays the birth of great leader under adverse circumstances, who later on transforms into exceptional leader to lead India to its long awaited independence from British Empire. Movie very well captures number of instances in the life of M. K. Gandhi which have an influential impact on the masses as well as on the viewers. How a leader can effectively and efficiently lead people with an unconventional style and what differentiates a good leader from an extraordinary leader are the highlights of the movie. Over the time different flavours of leadership style under

different circumstances can be observed. The legacy of Gandhiji's leadership remains one of the most powerful forces for peace in the world, and this film is a superb tribute to it. Charismatic, transformational, ethical leadership aspects are among the few that are quite significantly depicted in the movie.

Use of Power and Influence tactics

Power is useful for understanding how people are able to influence each other in organization (Mintzberg, 1983). Power involves the capacity of one party (the “ agent”) to influence another party (the “ target”). French and Raven (1959) developed taxonomy to classify different types of power according to their source. The taxonomy includes five different types of power as below

Reward Power

The target person complies in order to obtain reward controlled by the agent.

Coercive Power

The target person complies in order to avoid punishment controlled by the agent.

Legitimate Power

The target person complies because he/she believes the agent has the right to make request and the target person has the obligation to comply

Expert Power

The target person complies because he/she believes that the agent has special knowledge about the best what to do something.

Referent Power

The target person complies because he/she admires or identifies with the agent and wants to gain the agent's approval.

Gandhi's possession of power was more of a referent kind. As observed in the movie Gandhi always identified himself among the masses. He fought the battle in South Africa with a tie and a suit but when he came to India he changed his attire to that of an Indian peasant. Before he started his mission in Indian Gandhi went across all over India to meet people and know them. For this very reason in one of the scene Gandhi while addressing people says that, the battle for Indian Independence can be fought by being one among them.

As illustrated by Dubrin the end results of a leader's influence outcomes are a function of the influence tactics he or she uses. The influence tactics are in turn moderated, or affected by, the leader's traits and behaviours and the situation.

He further adds that the three possible outcomes are commitment, compliance, and resistance (as shown in the figure on next page).

Commitment represents the highest degree of success; the target of the influence attempt is enthusiastic about carrying out the request and makes it a full effort. Pretty much like an outcome of the non co-operation movement.

Compliance means that the influence attempt is partially successful. The

target person is apathetic (not overjoyed) and makes only a modest effort to carry out the request. This type was illustrated when in some parts the violence broke out in Hindu-Muslim. There were no signs of complete resistance where in an absolutely unsuccessful attempt was made. The model shown in figure on next page illustrates the possible end results of a leader's influence.

Gandhi power and Influence tactics_1. png

3. 1) DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF INFLUENCE TACTICS

Influence tactics are classified as those that are essentially ethical and honest versus those that are essentially manipulative and devious. Gandhiji has always used his ideals and principle in which he had beliefs to influence people. 'Non-violence' was one of the biggest influencing tools that Gandhiji used throughout. Gandhi always practiced as well as preached the importance of honesty, self dependency and courage. He had a completely ethical and honest approach to his ideologies. Considering that his influence tactics falls in to the category of Essentially Ethical and Honest Tactics.

Essentially Ethical and Honest Tactics

Used with tact, diplomacy, and good intent, the tactics described in this section can facilitate getting others to join you in accomplishing a worthwhile objective. These tactics vary in complexity and the time required to develop them.

1. Leading by Example and Respect. A simple but effective way of influencing group members is leading by example, or leading by acting as a

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positive role model. Being respected facilitates leading by example. Gandhi used to weave his clothes by himself. He appealed people to stop using western clothes and use the clothes made in India. He got a terrific response from the people wherein thousands of them burnt their clothes.

2. Using Rational Persuasion. To implement this tactic, the leader uses logical arguments and factual evidence to convince another person that a proposal or request is workable and likely to result in goal attainment. Rational persuasion is likely to be the most effective with people who are intelligent and rational. A major intervening variable in rational persuasion is the credibility of the influence agent. A subtle factor is that credible people are perceived as having higher power. Gandhi was an astute individual he always used simple facts and witty humour to convince another person. He had knowledge of law and during many incidences particularly a court scene in Champaran where he refuses to pay for bail, refrain from leaving the village as well and agrees to stay in jail knowing it would be difficult for court to keep him. Also many such logical arguments can be cited in the movie during his negotiations with the British, his comrades, press people and general public. He backed up his belief in non-violence by providing the evidence of his struggle for civil rights movement in South Africa.

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South African president recently quoted pertaining to Gandhiji " You produced a lawyer and we produced a leader out of him". Indeed, the first colours of this great leader's charisma were evident in South Africa when he was thrown out of first class compartment on racial basis. Gandhiji's self respect and an absolutely intolerant attitude to injustice made him to take a

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stand to proclaim the rights to be treated as equal citizen of Empire by peaceful means. He had a completely impartial view and courage to an extent that he was willing to take a blow but not accept injustice. His strong belief on the cause he was working on helped him to gain faith of the people and he gave them a way. This eventually led to reconsideration and abolition of act pertaining to racial discrimination of Indians in South Africa.

According to Weber (1947) charisma occurs during a social crisis, when a leader emerges with a radical vision that offers a solution to the crisis, and attracts followers who believes in the vision Particular situation in South Africa was emergent where in Gandhiji came out to be a strong and a highly charismatic leader. He had a vision to fight against the indiscriminate rules and eradicate them which he did successfully. Self- confidence, strong conviction in his beliefs, and high expectations and confidence on the abilities of the followers are clear evidences of a strong charismatic leader which Gandhi showed. Evidence is very well supported by current theories of charismatic leadership..

On his return to India, Gandhiji was looked upon with lots of hopes and expectation especially after the triumph in South Africa and his writing skills. In India he faced with a broader vision of a Home Rule Movement. Gandhiji's participation in peasant's problems against landlord in champaner signifies to large extend his stubborn nature and belief to fight against indiscrimination and injustice. It started when an individual approached Gandhiji with the problems the peasants in champaner were facing. Gandhiji's presence there to fight the problem clearly demonstrated the importance, respect, individual attention and consideration to an individual.

His rational approach towards the problem was very different and intellectually stimulating than what was expected, but it yielded results. Victory in Champaran had a message that spread all across India, it was a new way to fight and win.

Above observations guide towards the Transformation Leadership characteristics that Gandhiji demonstrated. According to Bass, transformational leadership can be defined based on the impact that it has on followers. Transformational leaders, Bass suggested, garner trust, respect and admiration from their followers. Various components that are part of transformational leadership are presented on the next page.

4. 1) Transformational Leadership:- Bass suggested that there were four different components of transformational leadership.

Idealized Influence - The transformational leader serves as a role model for followers. Because followers trust and respect the leader, they emulate the leader and internalize his or her ideals. Before Gandhi came to India he was already known for his writing and non-violent movement in South Africa. After he successfully fought to waive the taxes for the peasants, people of the entire nation looked up to him.

Individualized Consideration - Transformational leadership also involves offering support and encouragement to individual followers. In order to foster supportive relationships, transformational leaders keep lines of communication open so that followers feel free to share ideas and so that leaders can offer direct recognition of each follower's unique contributions. Gandhiji believed that to effectively lead people he needed to know and

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understand them at the grass root level. His expeditions to discover India illustrate the same. He believed that effective communication was a must to convey the message to the masses. And true representative of people should stand with the people and only then they will be able to face any challenges together.

Inspirational Motivation – Transformational leaders have a clear vision that they are able to articulate to followers. These leaders are also able to help followers experience the same passion and motivation to fulfil these goals. Gandhi always made his vision very clear and also the means by which he wanted to achieve it. He had a principle based approach which suited the people of India and people started looking up to him as they saw the feasibility of the goal achievement.

Intellectual Stimulation – Transformational leaders not only challenge the status quo; they also encourage creativity among followers. The leader encourages followers to explore new ways of doing things and new opportunities to learn. Gandhi used his writings and speeches to stimulate the masses. His writings were so impressive that people who were non aggressive in nature actually started believing that they could be a part of movement and contribute.

Below figure illustrates the transformational characteristics

transformational Leadership. jpg

4. 2 Ethical Leadership

As can be observed throughout the movie Gandhiji's battle was totally based on moral values, ethics, spirituality, family values and religious insights. He based his leadership on these grounds and people called him a " Mahatma" meaning a great soul. He always encouraged ethical practises like self discipline and dependency (weaving his own clothes), abolition of untouchability, truth and love. Gandhi had a high impact on the people because of his ethical characteristics of his leadership resulting into people giving up the foreign clothes and started weaving their own ' khadi' clothes. Below figure shows the various aspects of ethical leadership.

Ethical leadership theories fall into two categories Leaders conduct and Leaders character

Leaders conduct

Consequences (Theological theories)

Focus on what is right and what is wrong. Below table illustrates the different type of theological theories.

Ethical egoism

An individual should act to create the greatest good for themselves. A leaders should take a career that they would selfishly enjoy (Avolio & Locke, 2002). This is closely related to transactional leadership theories.

Utilitarianism

We should act to create the greatest good for the greatest number.

Maximize the social benefits while minimizing the social costs (Shumann, 2001).

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Altruism

This is the opposite of Ethical Egoism and is concerned with showing the best interest for others even when it runs contrary to self-interest. Authentic transformational leadership is based on altruistic behaviour (Bass, Steidlmeier, 1999).

Gandhi particularly demonstrated altruism in his acts. He fasted for several days to drive people towards his purpose of stopping violence. He never cared what impact it had on his own health, he persistently strived till he could see a desired outcome.

Duty (Deontological Theories)

This is telling the truth, keeping promises, being fair, independent of the consequences.

Gandhi always preached honest and was completely unbiased in his approach. This was very much evident when he asks his wife to leave the house when she disagrees to clean the toilets.

Actions should not infringe on others' rights and should not further the moral rights of others.

Gandhi's struggle for a civil rights movement in South Africa was a part of his belief that such unjust laws can't be forced on people and they should be treated equally on moral and humanitarian basis.

Leaders Character:-

Virtue-based theories –

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These are not innate, but can be acquired.

They are rooted in heart of the individual and in their disposition.

It focuses on telling people “ what to be” as opposed of “ what to do”

Examples include courage, temperance, generosity, self-control, honesty, sociability, modesty, fairness, and justice.

This theory is about being and becoming a worthy human being.

Above attributes of virtue based theories can be perfectly related to Gandhis behaviour, belief and preaching on numerous occasions throughout the movie.

Analysis of followers

Initially in South Africa the followers were sceptical about Gandhi resulting into a rather low turnout in one of the meeting he called for. His adamant attitude to burn the passes even after getting repeated blows from the police had a message in it. The rule was barred and people opened up to Gandhi's courage. They started believing and trusting him for fighting against the civil rights movement in South Africa. Gandhi was successful and emerged as a popular leader. Even before he came to India he was a hero for his triumph in South Africa. Gandhi wanted people in India to identify him as one among them, so he went to the people, heard their grievances and fought with them. Such type of attributes has a high impact on people as they start identifying the leader among themselves, started perceiving Gandhi to be trustworthy thereby giving up autonomy. Gandhi's leadership style was more of a followers-centric type. Followers who perceive the leader as responsible

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for making decisions (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007) are less likely to take an active role in the decision-making process, thereby giving up autonomy.

Robert E. Kelley described five styles of followership categorized according to two dimensions.

The first dimension:

Independent, critical thinking, versus dependent, uncritical thinking.

Independent thinking recalls the discussion of mindfulness; independent thinkers are mindful of the effects of people's behaviour on achieving organizational goals.

A dependent, uncritical thinker does not consider possibilities, does not contribute to the cultivation of the organization, and accepts the leader's ideas without thinking characterized by a need for constant supervision and prodding.

The second dimension:

Active versus passive behaviour. An active individual participates fully in the organization, and a passive individual is characterized by a need for constant supervision and prodding. The extent to which one is active or passive and is critical, independent thinker versus a dependent, uncritical thinker determines a type of followership style.

Below figure depicts the dimensions and the types of followers.

Followers. png

Below table illustrates a brief description of type of followers.

Alienated Follower

Alienated followers are often effective followers who have experienced setbacks and obstacles, perhaps broken promises by superiors. They focus exclusively on the shortcomings of the organization and other people.

Conformist Followers

A conformist carries out any and all orders regardless of the nature of the tasks, participating willingly but without considering the consequences. The only concern is to avoid conflict.

Pragmatic Followers

This type of follower uses whatever style best benefits a personal position and minimizes risk. Pragmatic survivors emerge when the organization faces desperate times, and followers do whatever is needed to get themselves through the difficulty.

Passive Follower

Being passive and uncritical, this type of follower displays neither initiative nor a sense of responsibility. Passive followers are often the result of leaders who are over controlling and punish mistakes.

Effective Follower

Effective followers behave the same toward everyone, regardless of their position. They do not try to avoid risk or conflict. They initiate change and

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put themselves at risk to serve the best interest of the organization; they are characterized by both mindfulness and a willingness to act.

Gandhi's followers were more of a conformist kind as they complied to his orders irrespective of whatever he asked them to do. Evidence of this was found after the salt satyagrah when they went ahead and took the beatings irrespective of the consequences without any retaliation. When Gandhi called for a salt satyagrah because of unlawful enforcement of taxes on salt millions of people marched behind him. Also the appeal made by Gandhiji to give up the western clothes and use those made in India was exemplary of how followers were ignorant of the consequences. It was the kind of influence Gandhi had on them and the trust they showed on Gandhi's decisions.

Development as a Leader

To be optimally effective, leadership development must be consistent with an organizations competitive strategy as well as with other human resources activities (Day2000; McCall, 1998). In the context of above description we can say that Gandhi's leadership skills developed from those in South Africa to those in India. Even though what was common at both places were his belief on his principles.

From being a leader of a community he turned to become a leader of masses. In South Africa Gandhi fought in suite and tie he wore same clothes as people there. He was not an eloquent speaker at that time as he was suggested to improve on those skills of his. His strong beliefs, courage and adamant attitude led a success in civil right movements in Africa. But when

he came to India he knew it was a different battle all together, there were expectation of millions of people riding on his shoulder. He took his time to know the people of India went across the country lived with them and heard there problems personally. He adapted to the situations in India realising that Indian battle for independence can't be fought in same way as that in Africa. He led in an exemplary way in India, wore clothes of a peasant, lived in a small house, weaved his own clothes his approach was more on ethical bases. In the later part it can also be observed that he came out as a better and a confident speaker. Because of his understanding of the people he had a clear vision of how he wanted to lead the battle for independence. He was always in control of the situations that were going on in the country. His effective negotiations skills while dealing with the British authorities were the evidence of his maturity as a leader.

Conclusion

Movie ' Gandhi' depicts a clear picture of Gandhi as a successful leader. Gandhi gave a nation to the people of India and satyagrah to the world one of the most revolutionary approach to struggle. Gandhi was a leader who inspired and still continues to inspire, people of all nation with his ethical and ideological legacy. Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and many other leaders follow his example. Frail, bespectacled figure with simple clothes and the ready smile led India to march on the path of glory on the basis of sheer principles and ethics which he preached and practiced. As he always said " Be the change you want to see in the world."