

# Study on malcolm x little



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Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in May 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska, USA. His father Earl Little was a Baptist teacher who was very outspoken on the ‘Back to Africa’ movement. This was a movement of Black Nationalist leader Marcus Garvey. Malcolm’s father was murdered in 1937 by white terrorist because of his political and social outspokenness. The death of Earl Little had a severely negative effect on Malcolm’s childhood and the entire Little family. Malcolm’s mother went mad under the weight of trying to bring up eight children alone in extreme poverty. His family was broken up and Malcolm went to live in a group foster home. In 1941, he went to live with his half sister in Boston. There he soon entered the fringes of the underworld and at the age of 17, he moved to Harlem where he turned to a life of crime, including drug dealing and armed robbery. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison for armed robbery at the age of 20.

In prison, Malcolm found an interest in the Nation of Islam, a Black Nationalist religious movement whose members are known as the Black Muslim. He became an ardent follower of the leader of the Nation of Islam; Elijah Muhammad who was a strong advocate of the Black Independent state. His teachings were founded on traditional Islamic teachings, Black Nationalism as taught by Marcus Garvey and self help programmes that catered for the need of African American living in poverty. The nation of Islam declared that the whites were evil by nature and predicted that in the near future a great war would take place and all the whites would be destroyed and black people would rule the world. In preparation for this new world, the Nation of Islam stressed personal self restraint from drugs and alcohol, and organized economic self help enterprises. The nation of Islam

recruited among the poorest of urban blacks and in prison which was were Malcolm Little converted to the Islamic faith and joined the Nation of Islam.

Malcolm X became a minister and a recruiter for the Nation of Islam and was appointed chief minister by Elijah Muhammad in 1954. Within five years of joining the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X had become a more prominent spokesman person for the Nation of Islam than Elijah Muhammad.

Malcolm X was a fundamental figure in his generation fighting against white supremacy against the blacks in America. He believed that the western societies were racist by nature and that African Americans should build their own societies and value systems. His course in life was from oppression and victimization to rebellion and revolutionary independence. His journey was from resistance to an informed radicalism. It was a journey from which he ultimately gathered political and historical insight which, combined with his tools of persuasion and skills at leadership, made him at the time of his death arguably the most dangerous figure in America's history to confront its ruling class.

## **LEADERSHIP AND ITS THEORIES**

Leadership is about coping with change. Leaders establish a course of action; develop a vision of the future and align the followers by communicating that vision and inspiring them to overcome hurdles. Leadership can also be said to be inspiring people to achieving a set of goal or vision.

Great leaders have always been associated with certain trait and qualities which differentiate them from followers. The trait theory attempts to identify the characteristics that distinguish leaders from followers by focusing on

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their personal qualities and characteristics. Such characteristics include charisma or charm, ambition, drive, courage amongst others. These attributes and characteristics have been associated with great leaders from time in history. T

Using the Big Five personality theory, the traits of ambition and energy in leaders are part of extroversion which has been identified as the most important trait of effective leaders. However extroversion has been identified as related strongly to leadership emergence rather than leadership effectiveness. Conscientiousness and openness to experience also are strongly correlated to leadership however not as strong as extroversion. Agreeableness and emotional stability on the other hand were not so strongly correlated with leadership. The Trait Theory suggest that leaders who like being around people and are able to assert themselves, who are disciplined and keep their commitments made, who are creative and flexible are in a better position to be good and effective leaders. Another trait that effective leaders have according to this theory is emotional intelligence. At the core of emotional intelligence is empathy. Empathic leaders can sense others needs, listen to their followers and show empathy to their plight.

Malcolm X we have seen and observed that he had basic education because of his race and he was a convicted criminal. However, this did not affect his level of effectiveness as a leader. He was able to transition from a criminal to a spokes man for his people. He exhibited extroversion, conscientiousness, emotional intelligence (empathy) towards to the people and the vision of the group.

Upon joining the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X wasn't the most active or longest serving member, he wasn't even high up in the hierarchy of things; however, he distinguished and demonstrated himself as a leader through his discipline, commitment, passion as a follower and his ability to assert himself on the followers of the vision of a Black Nation. These were the qualities that were identified by Elijah Mohammed that led to the selection of Malcolm X as Chief Minister for the Nation of Islam.

There were two propositions made by the Ohio State Studies on leadership behaviour which they tagged initiating structure and consideration.

Initiating structure includes behaviours that attempt to organize work, work relations and goals, providing structure in the organisation. It involves assignment of tasks to members of the group and expects a certain level of performance from followers.

Consideration has to do with having job relations characterized by mutual trust, respect for followers feelings. A leader with high consideration is friendly, approachable and concerned with his follower's personal problems.

In the life of Malcolm X there were characteristics of a leader high in initiating structure in his organization of the fellow members, assigning task to them in their conduct of meetings and mobilization of new members for the nation of Islam. He also showed high levels of consideration as he commanded a lot of respect from members as he was friendly and approachable and had genuine concern for their well being as exemplified in the case of a member being brutalized by the police. Malcolm X mobilized fellow members of the group to the police station and facilitated the release

of the member and ensured that he got medical care. This self sacrificial behaviour and concern for the followers attributes to his effectiveness in leadership.

Leaders who have certain traits and display consideration and initiate structuring behaviours appear to be more effective.

Malcolm X was able to find a balance between getting the job done and looking after the welfare of the members of the Nation of Islam. This is known as transformational leadership. The essence of Transformational Leadership Theory is the transformation of the attitudes, motivations and the behaviours of followers. Transformational leadership tries to raise the consciousness of followers by appealing to their self interest, moral values, mobilizing them to reform the institution they find themselves and in exchange provide benefits for the people by looking after their welfare. Such was the case of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam with the African Americans that were oppressed in United States. Malcolm X was inspirational and visionary, he was intellectually stimulating, he gave attention, respect and responsibility to his followers.

However transformational leadership theory alone cannot be used to explain the leadership style of Malcolm X, a further theory that can be used is the Charismatic Leadership theory. This is often thought of a sibling of transformational leadership or as a component of transformational leadership. This kind of leadership is best suited into political leadership

This Leadership theory is based on the perception of the followers that the leader is an exceptional human being. The followers willing to obey their

leader, in some cases they idolize their leader and are highly emotionally involved to the mission of the group. However based on Self concept theory, the above are not a necessary condition for Charismatic Leadership

Charismatic leadership generates increased self esteem and self worth for the leader, increased self efficacy and collective efficacy of the whole group, identification with the leader and the whole group and the internalization of the values of the leader. Charismatic leadership depends on the whole situation surrounding the leader, the leader's identity, behaviour, the culture, the follower's identity and the groups all entwined.

Charisma is likely attributed to leaders that have a vision that is highly controversial but for the ultimate benefit of the followers. These leaders must act in unconventional ways in order to impress the followers. This might include risking their lives for the course and vision they have for the people. Charismatic leadership can be used to describe Malcolm X style of leadership because he openly challenged the ruling class and spoke in a manner that was considered a threat to the American society. Malcolm X was self sacrificing and wasn't motivated by financial reward but the vision of the Nation of Islam which was why his followers trusted him because he was committed to the cause.

This leadership style of Malcolm X was influenced by his perceived leader Elijah Mohammed who was a very charismatic leader. Malcolm X encounter with Mohammed was such a transformation in his life that he was ready to lay down his life for Mohammed. He was ready to do anything that Mohammed would ask of him. Malcolm X idolized Mohammed and most likely

copied his leadership style as he saw Mohammed as a man sent from ‘Allah’. This was because Mohammed exuded such strong convictions and self confidence about his vision for the Nation of Islam and his beliefs that there was a deliverance coming to the people. The praise and recognition received by Malcolm X and his rise to fame by being appointed chief minister by Muhammad further built up his self confidence and a deeper obligation to meeting the set standard by Mohammed. Malcolm X was also influenced by him internalizing the new belief of the nation of Islam by adopting the belief of Mohammed and his vision.

Another influence on the transformational/charismatic leadership style of Malcolm X was his environment. In his time America was in a crisis; the blacks were in a crisis, having suffered from racism, oppression and victimization from the ruling class. The African Americans were looking for a leader to give them hope of a better tomorrow and Malcolm X provided that hope. This situation of crisis was an influence in the leadership style of Malcolm X.

Comparing and contrasting the leadership styles of Malcolm X and West Indian Archie who introduced Malcolm X to the world of drinking, drugs and armed robbery. Archie had a transactional leadership style, where the leader rewards the follower for performance. Such was the relationship between Archie and Malcolm X. This style of leadership is non inspirational, non motivation and commitment and level of trust is low and in some cases non-existent as seen in the movie.



Also comparing Malcolm X leadership style and that of Baines, Malcolm X was a more of a transformational /Charismatic leader while Baines was more of a transactional leader, where the leader offers rewards for compliance and performance. Transactional leadership style motivates followers by appealing to the followers self interest and exchange of benefits. This kind of leadership is necessary but not sufficient for the overall performance of the group. Unlike transformational leadership, transactional leadership isn't concerned about the welfare of the followers or their emotion or their needs but rather on getting the job done. In this form of leadership, followers are only rewarded based on their actions, behaviours and compliance with the expectations of the leader. As such the followers are not very committed to the leader and have a lower level of trust for that kind of leader than the transformational /Charismatic leader.

The difference in leadership style as well as beliefs and expectations of Malcolm X and Baines might have led to the conflict that arose between Malcolm X and the leaders of the Nation of Islam. The conflict of interest that arose due to the other leaders enriching themselves at the expense of the vision and the followers was a major turn in the life of Malcolm X as well as the rumours of Muhammad's extramarital affairs with young secretaries. Such actions were against the teachings of the Nation. Although at first Malcolm X ignored the rumours, but the women started making their accusations public and this was potentially damaging to the Nation of Islam. After several denials, Muhammad later confirmed the rumours and tried to justify his actions by referring to precedents by Biblical prophets. This was a major betrayal for Malcolm X.

## **FOLLOWERS RELATIONSHIP WITH LEADERSHIP**

Upon release from prison, Malcolm X became a follower, a follower of Elijah Mohammed, a follower of the Nation of Islam. He played a passive role in this leadership followership relationship as well as when he was peddling drugs on the streets of Harlem with West Indian Archie, he was a recipient of leadership from West Indian Archie. This role the follower plays can be described as 'followers as recipients of leadership'. This is essentially a linear relationship between the leader and followers. After he was chosen as the chief minister for the nation of Islam, Malcolm X was still a follower of Mohammed, however he had evolved from a follower as a recipient of leadership to being a moderator of leadership.

This is based on the situation theory and depends on the level of maturity and needs of the follower amongst other factors. The leader moves from the telling style to the selling style, the participatory style then finally to the delegating style. Malcolm X exhibited high level of maturity, motivation and had an established relationship with Mohammed which made him a moderator of leadership.

Followers as moderators of leadership suggests that though followers see themselves as passive in the relationship but the influence the leader has maybe moderated by the level of maturity, ability and motivation of the follower. The leader must take on an active role in the leadership process. There are aspects of followers that leaders need to take into account when leading these are: the followers initial attitude towards the leader, the followers acceptance of the leader, the followers need for emotional support

and the followers knowledge and congruence of their values with that of the leader.

After becoming the chief spokes person for the influence Mohammed had over Malcolm X -his follower was neutralize meaning that the task oriented or relationship oriented activities made no difference to the attitude and behaviour of Malcolm X.

Followers as substitute for leadership originates from the substitutes for leadership theory, which argues that under some circumstances, the influence that a leader exerts over his follower may be substituted or neutralized. In the case of substitution, the activities of the leader are not necessary. However this requires the followers to be highly intelligent and very experienced hence might not have need for a leader as was with Malcolm X. The substitute theory deemphasizes the significance of the leader.

Followers are also seen as constructors of leadership because if they do not recognize it as leadership then it isn't leadership. There are three theories that identify the construction process. These are the romance of leadership theory; where the identity and influence of the leader depends on the manner in which their followers perceive them, psychoanalytic theories; which identifies that leadership is influenced by the model of leadership exhibited by parents teachers and other adults in the maturation process from child to adulthood in the case of Malcolm X the influence of his father as a human right advocate to his style of leadership, the social identity

theory proposes the extent to which a leader is selected by a group will depend on how representative he/she is to that group.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Malcolm X was a great person because of his honesty and sacrifice. He was a transformation and charismatic leader that influenced millions in his generation and generations after to stand up for their rights and beliefs and freedom. His words and actions are still celebrated in America even today.