

# Mandela's leadership: long walk to freedom report

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



Leadership integrates and intertwines followers and leaders. It also influences organisational and societal objectives and missions. Considering this importance, it is critical for all organisations and societies to develop effective leadership. The current paper analyses the effectiveness of leadership with reference to Nelson Mandela, the late former president of South Africa, as depicted in the movie, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*. It uses the DuBrin (2013) model for analysis to achieve this objective. The model depicts leadership effectiveness as a function of the internal and external environment, group membership characteristics, and leader's behaviour, styles, and characteristics. Linking this model to leadership theories, the paper concludes that Nelson Mandela was an effective leader to the extent that he possessed many of the leadership traits, skills, and capabilities, which leadership theorists describe as constituting an effective leader.

Leadership is essential at all levels of society. It is crucial for the success of any nation (Atchison, 2003; Dye, 2010). Leadership inspires followers to work collectively towards the achievement of specific goals, aims, and objectives. As a practice, it influences not only followers, but also leaders in a manner that ensures the attainment of societal objectives through change. This claim means that leadership incorporates followers and leaders in an attempt to influence and/or achieve societal objectives and missions (Lussier & Achua, 2004). While leading, followers or group members must be involved. Steered by Justin Chadwick, the movie, 'Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom', Nelson Mandela, as played by Idris Elba, depicts various leadership traits among them being his transformational leadership aspects and ability to influence

and guide his followers/group members. He is also a determined character who lives to achieve the objective of delivering South Africa from apartheid. This paper analyses the effectiveness of leadership as depicted in the film 'Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom'.

Directed by Justin Chadwick, the movie borrows its plot from an autobiographic book that was distributed under the same title and authored by an anti-apartheid revolutionary group based in South Africa. The movie reflects the early life of the late Nelson Mandela, his journey in education, and his 27-year life in prison. It also chronicles his life as the president of South Africa with a focus on his contribution to rebuilding nation, which had then been divided along racial lines, to foster reconciliation and healing. His achievement of this objective reflects his effectiveness in leading by influencing people to adopt a common way of thinking to foster nationalism that is built around perspectives of embracing ethnic and racial diversity.

In the movie, Nelson Mandela constitutes a lawyer who leaves his career to become a political actor by forming and leading ANC (African National Congress). In 1940, the apartheid law became unbearable among South Africans due to its tyranny and brutality. Mandela forcibly departs peaceful demonstrations following the Sharpeville massacre. He paid a large price when he and his comrades received life imprisonment on allegations of treason. His wife also faces direct abuse that is acerbated by the racist authorities. However, chains do not threaten his leadership abilities and potential. He continues to struggle with authorities by advocating racism

while he is still subjected to captivity until he slowly progresses to emerge an international leader who is emulated by many people across the globe.

A leader is a person who plans, manages, directs, and guides other people towards the attainment of common mutual objectives and goals. A successful leader must be effective in his work. This section deploys DuBrin (2013) leadership effectiveness evaluation framework as shown in figure 1 to critically analyse the effectiveness of Nelson Mandela's leadership as depicted by the movie 'Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom'.

Framework for Evaluating Leadership Effectiveness. Source: DuBrin (2013)

DuBrin's (2013) model suggests that the effectiveness of leadership is a function of leadership characteristics, internal and external environment, membership group traits, and leadership behaviours. The film 'Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom' illustrates two major components of effective leadership, namely organisational and personal elements. Lussier and Achua (2004) reveal that success in leadership demands knowledge and commitment to the two elements.

Leadership influences the relationship between leaders and employees who act as a tool for change within a society, which must reflect the shared purpose of interaction among followers and leaders. This claim suggests that an effective leader must have the capability to assess both internal and external environment in an effort to establish a common and/or shared value and strategic objective. Mandela effectively organises all people, not only outside the prison but also inside it to drive a common societal agenda

(Chadwick 2013). People who oppose the prevailing regime and/or who find their way into prison where Mandela is held anticipate suffering and mistreatments from the authorities. However, Mandela has some personal characteristics, which enable him to ensure that all people remain glued to their common cause. He is a courageous and determined person who ensures the complete transformation of South African society.

Group membership characteristics determine the capacity of a leader to lead in an effective manner (DuBrin 2013). Leadership literature contends that qualities that describe effective followership and membership are similar to those that describe effective leadership (Atchison 2003). The importance of followership and group membership theories and leadership hypotheses to leaders is pegged on the assertion that leadership is linked to followership. Understanding this link makes it possible to adopt an appropriate leadership style to achieve specific objectives or goals (Dye, 2010). Such a relationship is implied by understanding the actual works of a leader within a society.

Mandela's main goal encompasses transforming South Africa into a nation that embraces the rights and equality of people amid their diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. Many leadership premises such as participatory and transformational leadership theories contend that leaders serve the principal functions of directing and guiding the behaviours of various people who must work together in teamwork. For this goal to happen, Daft (2005) insists that leaders cannot realise their visions without the aid of their followers. Therefore, follower or group members must embrace and welcome the

process of being directed by persons whom they believe are supposed to lead them.

The existence of a good relationship between leaders and group members within a society initiates by the creation of a good understanding of the function and purpose of leadership among those that one leads. Mandela articulates well the purposes of his struggle with authority, although it comes at a price to his group members since some of them also find their way into prison (Chadwick 2013). The purpose entails liberating people from discriminatory policies, which uphold skin colour segregation of the South African people. Mandela's effectiveness in forming working and strongly tied group membership relationships is evidenced by the fact that even if followers of his ideologies also suffer from mental and physical torture, they do not give up on what they believe is the best for South Africans.

In the movie, Mandela is careful to identify a common purpose for all people. This aspect makes him an effective leader. A leader must serve the interests of his or her followers for them to accept his or her leadership. Mechanisms that are used by group members/followers to accept other people as leaders are described in emerging and growing body of leadership literature, namely implicit leadership. This body of knowledge is also referred to as leadership categorisation. Implicit leadership is defined as the 'pre-existing assumptions and prototypes about the behaviours, traits, and abilities that one's prototypical leader possesses' (Kedharnath 2011, p. 4). From this school of thought, one becomes an effective leader if the lead parties perceive him or her as a leader. Individuals who are not perceived as leaders

are likely not to influence or be considered effective in their work in relation to those who are accepted as good leaders by the followers. Hence, leaders must understand that their effectiveness is not only a function of how they execute their roles, but also a function of their acceptability as leaders by people who they lead. In this quest, an understanding of cognitive categorisation of their prototype schemas as developed by the group members is crucial.

As showcased in the movie, Mandela possesses incredible skills in evaluating the schemas and perception of people's preferred leader. Schemas involve the various forms of cognitive systems for a society that people deploy to encode any incoming information. They act as pivotal platforms for comparing incoming and pre-existing stimuli that are related to people and other physical objects. This observation means that the judgment of an individual based on such stimuli is highly influenced by the schemas. Followers possess schemas such that they have knowledge and anticipations of the manner in which a leader should relate with them so that they can comply with his or her guidelines. Mandela knows well that the main objective, which also constitutes the main people's suffering, is discrimination on the lines of their racial background (Chadwick 2013). Thus, he is determined to sacrifice his life. His key driver is to achieve his objective of making people achieve racial equality in South Africa.

Daft (2005) maintains that group members deploy cognitive categorisation in the process of dispensing information that relates to their leaders. This claim implies that effective leaders understand that followers employ schemas that

exist within themselves based on perceptions of their preferred model leaders as avenues to achieve their own interest. Hence, they must comply with his or her directions while having a positive feeling that they should belong to the headship camp of the boss if they have to achieve a solution to a common problem (McFarlin, Sweeney & Cotton 2012). Through Mandela's leadership, it is clear that he is determined to ensure that the dignity of his people is restored. Since racial discrimination is a common challenge of all people in South Africa, he ensures that he builds his success around this common challenge.

Scholarly research by Pearce and Conger (2003) reveals that effective leaders possess some traits, which enable them to achieve their goals and objectives. This argument is advanced through trait leadership theories. Leaders possess personality attributes, behaviour, and cognitions that influence their effectiveness. Pearce and Conger (2003) assert that effective leaders not only lead others but also practice self-management to enhance their credibility whilst ensuring that they are not self-centred. These personality traits determine effective in one's leadership. Effective leaders are truthful, possess emotional intelligence, are compelling, situational conscious, and answerable (Gardner & Stough 2009). Mandela is not only honest with what he wants for South Africa but also ready to take responsibility for these ideologies on behalf of the society by serving life imprisonment on allegations for planning treason.

DuBrin (2013) asserts that to enhance their effectiveness, leaders also need to highlight appropriate behaviours such as emotional intelligence (EI).



Alston (2009) suggests that EI has the ability to predispose leaders to deploy behaviours that are transformational in their work environments. The leadership sub-component of transformational motivation helps to accurately perceive and evaluate the extent to which group members' anticipations can be met. This claim confirms Leban and Zulauf's (2004) findings that emotionally intelligent leaders need to understand the needs of the people they lead as the basis of making appropriate decisions within organisations. Mandela identified the ending of racial stigmatisation and discrimination as a common need among all native South Africans.

Empathy constitutes an important behaviour and attribute of effective leaders. Polychroniou (2009) links qualities such as empathy, social skills, and motivation to perspectives of transformational leadership. In the same line of research, Clarke (2010) confirms the direct correlation between the competences of project managers with their levels of attentiveness to details. Empathy acts as the chief mediator of various social skills and effectiveness that leaders must possess. This observation implies a possible relationship that exists between social skills and empathy among leaders such as Mandela who are able to orient their followers proactively to common objectives and goals.

Mandela is empathetic to the extent that he has experience of what it feels to experience racial discrimination in one's motherland. However, while conducting an examination of various non-transformational styles of leadership, some styles do not necessarily need leaders to have empathy towards other people. These styles include leadership through exception-

active and/or leadership through exception-passive (Butler & Chinowsky 2006). The authors also claim that these two approaches in leadership only depict reactive behaviours (Butler & Chinowsky 2006). In the study of leadership styles that deployed 56 project managers, Clarke (2010) concluded that EI is congruently related to the vital elements of transformational leadership. These aspects include individualised deliberation, idealised persuasion, and stirring motivation. On different research, Alston (2009) reports a very high correlation between inspirational motivation and EI. This finding is important to the extent that Mandela's success in transforming South Africa also inspires people to commit their energy in fighting for a better future nation, which promotes racial equality.

Leadership constitutes an important element in any society that seeks to achieve change. South Africa experienced apartheid. South African people wanted to achieve racial equality. Upon identifying this common objective, Mandela volunteered to propel this necessary change, although it involved risking his life. In the movie, 'Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom', Mandela portrays capabilities that underlie the capacity to develop effective leadership in society. These traits include emotional intelligence, empathy, charismatic, situational awareness, and accountability, among others. The paper has maintained that Mandela possesses these traits of effective leadership. He not only enthusiastically approaches the problem of racial discrimination but also creates an ideology that the situation is not hopeless and that people can have their dignity restored. This force helps in inducing inspirational motivation among all South Africans.

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