

18/10/01

**Book Review by Kylie Hull
(as a requirement of unit 55209 Leadership Development)**

of

Mandela — the Authorised Biography

Sampson, A. 1999, Harper Collins Publishers, London

Lessons for Modern Leadership Development

Over the last decade we have witnessed significant change within organisations as they search for ways to work smarter, increase profitability and survive in an ever-increasing competitive marketplace. Organisations are placing more emphasis on developing their workforce as they recognise the value in developing and fostering their people. Employees are no longer regarded as components or dispensable resources in organisations. They are fast becoming the competitive advantage behind business success, and attributes that enable the organisation to perform beyond expectations (Morgan & Hampson 1998, p.1). Argyris and Schon, as early as 1978, observed the challenge for senior management to develop and implement people-focused change that fosters learning. They noted that the common element prevalent in most successful organisations was their leadership capability — to drive communication, individual and team achievement and foster collective decision making — to drive effective and long term change (p. 254).

The distinction between a manager and a leader has become more significant in the quest to drive change through people involvement. It is argued that ‘managers’ focus on getting the job done. They demonstrate transactional behaviours that are important for operation, but do not invoke the level of performance from staff that transformational ‘leaders’ create (James 2001, p. 16). Parry supports this belief by stating that management is transactional and leadership is transformational. Managers plan, reward, monitor and control, whilst leaders transform from stability to enthusiasm for challenge, change and progress. It is this leadership that fosters the motivation and willingness of the workforce to embrace change, the key element that organisations are seeking (Parry 1996, p. 27).

When considering the point that organisations need leaders to succeed in the competitive environment, what is it exactly that they need to foster? What are the behaviours, competencies and traits that set a leader apart from a manager, that gives them the ability to foster shared values and behaviours internally within the organisation and promote the achievement of strategic goals? There is a significant amount of literature on leadership development, and ample examples in our history of effective leaders, for us to reflect upon and contemplate the answers to these questions. Charismatic leaders such as Stalin, Hitler and Mao inflicted evil and suffering on humanity, yet it can be argued that the leadership styles of these individuals was the key or driving factor to their leading masses to commit horrific crimes against humanity.

To explore these questions, this paper will explore the leadership style of a past leader, Nelson Mandela. A review of his authorised biography will provide understanding of the person, the qualities, and other aspects of the man that made him a leader. By considering his

style this paper will reflect on characteristics sought in future business leaders in today's organisations.

Nelson Mandela is the last of the succession of revolutionary leaders in Asia and Africa who fought for their freedom, were imprisoned and reviled, and were eventually recognised as heads of state (Sampson 1999, p. xxiv). The myth is so powerful that it has motivated many authors to consider what makes the man, and what made him “the universal hero at the end of the twentieth century” (p. xxiv). In the book titled *Mandela — the Authorised Biography*, Anthony Sampson explores the life of Nelson Mandela from his early childhood — which Sampson argues significantly shaped the character of the man — through to his old age as a monarch. This book is the subject of this paper.

The book is written in three parts, each looking at Mandela's life and its stages. Part One considers his life between 1918 and 1964, and explores the child Mandela, his roots and the key events in his childhood that moulded his morals and values. The author considers significant events in the first 46 years of his life, before his imprisonment as the young, passionate Mandela. Part Two looks at Mandela's life in prison and the impact this had on him as a person, how it shaped his values and beliefs, and significant events to give an insight into his life. Part Three presents Mandela as the leader, the up and coming, and then, prime minister for the nation, and highlights how he operated in the political and organisational environment. The final chapters of the book reflect on how Mandela became the man he is, and how the journey of his life has so much more significance than what he achieved whilst he was in power.

One of the most striking and encapsulating statements made by Sampson, the author of the book, can be found in the early chapters, where he observes the old Mandela interacting with a range of people. He contemplates how Mandela is equally capable of having a banquet with the Queen, and entertaining the younger generation and relating to their music and interests. He highlights the reaction the man invokes in crowds in London, both black and white, where children wear Mandela t-shirts and wave flags, and reach out to touch him as he passes. He entertains masses of people at functions and remembers names, radiates goodwill and reaches out his hand to welcome each and every individual with a powerful eye contact that makes each person feel like a personal friend. Sampson, through his account, is highlighting Mandela's ability to lead from the front, through his example and, as he states, “learning early in his life how to build up and understand his own image” (p. xxvi). Mandela clearly has the ability to relate to a wide range of people at such a personal level that attracts a unique affection, not just in Britain, but throughout Europe, America and Asia. His charisma and style embraces people to the point where they want to follow his lead. His presence is his power, and his ability to interact with people his strength. As discussed by James (2001), this quality is shared by many transformational leaders such as Mandela, where their individualised consideration, intelligent stimulation, inspiration and motivation, and demonstrated care and compassion for workers becomes the characteristics that truly set them apart from other people/managers (p. 16).

Saros (in James 2001) argues that people become leaders because they are good, they know the right people, are ego driven or incredibly energetic, or both. They must also want to be a leader — the desire to lead (James p. 19). Sampson notes that Mandela possessed all these qualities. He states that Mandela was always a master of images who knew how to project himself. He states that his charisma and confidence, and his showmanship, were true

leadership traits that made Mandela the living hero (1999, p. 579). Mandela has many varying images: that of the chief, the showman, the revolutionary, the guerrilla leader, the prisoner, the statesman, and he could play a different role to each audience. The man had rapport with young people and with the older generation, and this was attributed to his ability to relate to others, his energy and his desire to lead. Sampson highlights a famous quote from W.E. Henley's Victorian poem *Invictus* that Mandela has indicated he is fond of. "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul". Sampson notes that this quote very much depicts the attitude of Mandela and his desire to lead, which he has also attributed to the man's success (p. xxviii).

In a study conducted by AFR Boss (2001), business people, academics, management consultants, board members and people working in the public and not-for-profit organisations were asked to nominate the names of some leaders that they know who meet a set of key elements for leadership.

These key elements included:

- **Financial measures** — share price and profits over the past twelve months, sustainability of profits
- **Relations within the organisation** — attraction and retention of employees, industrial relations record, family friendly work practices and empowerment of employees
- **Vision** — strategic ability and ethics in their application
- **Relations with the broader community** — practice of triple bottom line audits, engagement of the community, philanthropy and commitment to the local community (AFR Boss 2001, p. 39).

The AFR Boss (2001) study identified a list of 'Australian Leaders' that met their criteria. These leaders had a number of things in common in that their success has been driven by strong values and performance fuelled by their belief that their organisation could be enhanced if it were stronger. Many of these leaders have backed a radical internal change program focused on developing a more personal culture in the workplace. They are seen as strong motivators and organisers, very persuasive and visionary. They have all been described as true people persons, good communicators and having wide public/people appeal. As leaders, they seem to commonly share the view that success is directly related to building the right culture, and designing workplaces that allow people to exercise their initiative and creativity to leverage off the talent of the team (AFR Boss 2001, p. 40). Again, these traits are consistent with those described by Sampson for Mandela. He highlights that Mandela rarely negotiated with other political parties and individuals, but rather possessed a communication style that facilitated meetings and outcomes (1999, p. 385). Sampson quotes Kobie Coetsee, the then Minister for Justice in South Africa, who made eleven specific observations of Mandela. Kobie states that Mandela:

- is exceptionally motivated and maintains a strong idealistic approach
- maintains outstanding personal relations
- is manipulative, but nevertheless not tactless, nor provocative
- acknowledges his shortcomings, but nevertheless believes in himself
- is practical, and a pragmatic thinker who can arrive at a workable solution on a philosophical basis
- has the capacity for integrated and creative thought

- has an unbelievable memory to reproduce things in fine detail
- has an unflinching belief in his cause
- regards himself as called to the task
- believes self-discipline and continually taking initiative to be the prerequisites for success
- has no visible signs of bitterness towards the whites (1999, p. 299).

Sampson highlights a number of times in the book how Mandela not only lead a political party, he led a culture, with almost a cult following, and represented an image or idol of some great salvation for the nation. Conger (in AFR Boss 2001) argues that our future leaders need to be strategic opportunists, globally aware and capable of managing highly decentralised organisations (p. 205). He suggests that organisations need to spend time creating leaders who are sensitive to diversity, interpersonally competent and prepared to build and manage a community culture within the business. The maximum amount of leverage comes from such experience, and when teamed with planned and structured competency development, true leaders will drive the business to success. Mandela mastered this attribute of leadership. Sampson indirectly compares the different leadership styles or stages of Mandela's leadership development over the years, and man's growing level of understanding of how these different leadership styles can help or hinder an organisation's or group's functioning. Leaders need to gain an understanding of their own behaviour and how people react to that behaviour so they can moderate or demonstrate alternative behaviour (Cummings & Worley 1997, p. 219).

In a paper by Sinclair (1995), four clusters of leadership characteristics, skills and qualities are proposed that have been commonly found in studies and research. The first of these is *Cognitive Skills and Performance* whereby the individual has a greater rate of learning, intellectual capacity, consistent high performance, technical expertise and strategic capability (1995, p. 30). Sampson states that Mandela particularly possessed these qualities in that he had the ability to be creative and innovative, and demonstrated an above-average memory, along with the ability to learn and recall things quickly. He always saw the big picture and did not get lost in the intricacies of the time. His strategic approach to change was built in leading a united struggle of the people — unity of all Africans, unity of all national groups, unity of communists and non-communists in the fight for freedom (1999, p. 174).

The second leadership characteristic quoted by Sinclair (1995) is *Motivational Qualities* including drive, energy, motivation and initiative and the ability to empower others (1995, p. 30). Sampson's biography refers to this quality in Mandela constantly in every chapter. He notes Mandela's charisma, his ability to motivate others, to be the hero, to drive the nation. Whilst he demonstrated some authoritarian tendencies, which were at odds with democratic controls, he never used the term 'I', and delivered motivated masses as 'we', standing together to fight for freedom. Early in Sampson's book he creates an image of a tickertape parade for Mandela where the young sit on the roadsides waving flags and wearing Mandela shirts. He became the icon.

Mandela particularly possessed the ability to appeal to others through his interpersonal skills. He would often welcome guests as they walked into the room, creating immediate rapport. He would remember people's names and infuse warmth and energy, relating to people closely rather than from a distance. This supports Sinclair's third leadership characteristic of *Interpersonal Skills* where the individual possesses human resource management capability, listening skills, clear and open communication and the ability to lead people (1995, p. 30).

Sinclair's fourth leadership characteristic he discusses is *Administrative Skills* where the individual is decisive, flexible, has breadth of vision and a customer and business focus (1995, p. 30). Mandela demonstrates this through his ability to be visionary. He would state 'in nation building you sometimes need a bulldozer and sometimes a feather duster' (p. 520). Whilst his charisma was a prominent quality that led to his success, it is noted by Sampson that it is easy to overestimate the importance of a living hero with universal charisma 'on a stage whose bright lights can fade soon afterwards' (p. 579). His business sense, strategic ability and breadth of vision are all abilities that provided the foundation for his leadership capability. This is why he became the global icon (p. 585).

Conclusion

Leadership studies have focused on leadership functions and leadership styles that lead to the most effective group performance. There are a wide range of models that aim to classify and simplify leadership qualities to help managers understand their leadership style and how it impacts on others (Stoner, Collins & Yetton, 1985, p. 575-6). This paper has pulled together a few of these theories and looked for similarities between the characteristics they refer to and the traits, behaviours and abilities of a true leader in our history.

Analysis clearly highlights that Mandela possessed a large number of those components referred to in the literature. He demonstrated leadership abilities from his grass roots through to leading a nation.

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