

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP & THE PROCESS OF CHANGE



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With the process of changing a dysfunctional society, the most important driver of transformation is the role of visionary, moral and transformational leaders, to inspire people, to give hope, and to create innovative alternatives for sustaining the process. Dysfunctional societies, such as those struggling with poverty, unemployment and corruption, where moral and strategic leadership has failed, are an inevitable outcome of the power vacuums and destabilisation created by transformation to independence and democratisation. This happens because neither liberation struggles nor colonialism (including the former apartheid regimes in South Africa and Namibia), have prepared

developing countries for good governance. Commitment from the top is a key aspect to direct and institutionalise good governance during the process of change.

Mobilising new visions

The systemic definition of a transformational leader, according to Ackoff (2009), is "one who can produce, or encourage and facilitate the production of, a mobilising vision of a transformed system". The leader must be able to inspire people for the voluntary achievement of a vision, and to mobilise and co-ordinate people, not to command and control. To inspire people and to unleash the energy to transform a systemically corrupt institution, a leader needs to be credible, respected and committed. Credibility in this sense means that leaders must present themselves as believable and trustworthy.

Role models of transformation

Role models of moral and transformational leadership, such as Mahatma Ghandi, Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama, can play an inspiring role in unifying people to transform a society. Other examples of such leadership in community work include Mother Theresa, Florence Nightingale and Princess Diana, business/entrepreneurial leaders such as Richard Branson and Bill Gates, moral leaders against apartheid in South Africa such as Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naude, and education leaders such as Jonathan Jansen (Rector of the University of the Free State). During times of uncertainty and change, such as the transition of developing countries from liberation struggles and civil war to democratisation and in unifying people to transform society,

people need to identify with strong role models. Such role models can provide the necessary moral and strategic direction for success.

Inspiration for transformation

Transformational leaders can inspire people and this inspiration has strategic implications for changing a dysfunctional society by developing people and systems, creating opportunities for development. Leaders of society therefore need to manage interactions among people in order to develop the necessary institutional/social capital and trust.

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For this to take place; learning institutions need to be created with a 'learning-adaptation support system' (Ackoff, 2009) which enables second-order learning (qualitative learning, e.g. insight into understanding systems) and second-order change (change of attitudes, behaviour and culture to adapt to the changing environment successfully). To change a dysfunctional society, it is imperative to understand such a system, its assumptions and the implications associated with the transformation towards achieving the desired outcome or vision.