Inkosi[1] Albert Luthuli's Leadership Style(s):
Implications for School Leaders Building Effective Schools

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Abstract

Arguably, Inkosi Albert Luthuli was among the most influential leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) in the 1950s until his death in 1968. The first African in history to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961, Luthuli became the symbol for righteousness, peace and fairness in a South Africa that perpetrated state violence against the oppressed. Renowned for his equanimity and resolute nature Luthuli was a steadfast leader of the people. Many oral historians continue to unravel information that attests to these characteristics. This paper focuses on the leadership qualities that Luthuli practiced. It unravels qualities school leaders can utilize from the philosophy of this Nobel Prize Laureate. The values he cherished continue to be relevant in today's organizations. This paper explores specific qualities enshrined in Luthuli's philosophy; inclusiveness, social justice, peace, anti-violence and diversity. Amongst others, the paper concludes by contending that effective leaders will emulate the servant leadership qualities that Luthuli embodied. South Africa produced various leaders during and after his time. However, it was Luthuli's unique personality that made him the powerful yet humble leader that he was. In building and sustaining working schools, school leaders can glean much from his style and model of leadership.

Keywords: Servant leadership. Social justice leadership. Anti-violence. Diversity. Peace.

1. Introduction

Growing literature on leadership delineates a number of leadership styles that can be followed to sustain effective organizations. Instructional leadership, authoritarian leadership, democratic leadership and moral leadership models are some of the models that school leaders can adopt as they steer their institutions. Bush (2007) lists a number of leadership styles that school leaders can adopt and these include participative, contingency, political and transformational models. Msila (2008) reports on a case study where *ubuntu* (usually loosely referred to as African humanism) was utilized by a teacher who aspired to build a working school environment based on sound values. This author refers to this as a form of an African leadership model. Furthermore, Fullan who has written widely on change management stresses the need to foster moral leadership in schools. Whatever styles the leaders choose in their schools, it is vital for them to choose the effective ones for their contexts. An incorrect or irrelevant style may be the difference between a well-functioning school and a failing school. There are hardly blueprints and one-size-fit all. Conscientious leaders will be able to discern which style/s will be suitable for their school contexts.

This article looks at Inkosi Albert Luthuli's leadership style and shows how some of his leadership qualities can be adapted in leading effective schools. Current research demonstrates that schools will be as good as the people at their helm. Effective leaders are likely to lead working schools. As ensuing discussions will show, Luthuli's leadership qualities will suit organizations that seek to explore a certain style or eclectic approach to leadership. This article will first look at what literature says about issues of social justice and collaboration. Social justice leadership, diversity management, inclusive approaches as well as leadership for peace are all pivotal aspects in Luthuli's leadership model. These are all qualities that Luthuli upheld in his lifetime, however, before discussing these in-depth it is apt to briefly look who Luthuli was.

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[1] *This is a Xhosa or Zulu title which means the revered one. It signifies huge respect. The loose English translation is "chief".*

2. Inkosi Albert Luthuli: The Man and the Leader

Luthuli's legacy is immortalized in Groutville, a small area in the North of KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa. His house was declared a national heritage site in 2010 by the Minister of Arts and Culture and has since been turned into a museum. A true man of the people who was born in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe died in 1967 at the age of 69. Luthuli qualified as a school teacher and was the secretary of African Teachers Association in Kwazulu-Natal. He led the African National Congress when it was fighting the apartheid government. His strategy of non-violence and peace initiatives earned him the Nobel Prize in 1961. Luthuli was repeatedly arrested and banned by the apartheid government. However, even during these hard times, he was able to practice exemplary leadership that he exercised during his trying tenure as a leader of an organization. In 1953, the Bantu Education Act was introduced. In 1956 hundreds of the members of his organization were arrested in the infamous Treason Trial. Even when the ANC had a splinter group, the PAC Luthuli held the organization together. He based his leadership on consultation and cooperation.

3. Social Justice Leadership

Furman (2012) argues that it is not easy to define social justice. He cites several authors who define social justice leadership. Furthermore, Furman highlights some important aspects of social justice leadership including the point that social justice leaders are proactive change agents who are engaged in transformative leadership. In addition, Furman cites Brooks and Miles who argue that to do transformative work social justice leaders must develop a heightened awareness of oppression, exclusion and marginalization. Robinson and Barber (2013) link social justice leadership to servant leadership activity grounded in commitment to social justice. Social justice leadership brings hope, equity, and support for all role-players, especially those who are or have been marginalized by the systems at play. Theoharis (2007) point out that leaders for social justice guide their schools to transform the culture, curriculum, pedagogical practices, atmosphere and school wide priorities to benefit the marginalized. Social justice leadership aims to be inclusive and can be truly realised when all role-players in schools are treated equitably. Theoharis (2007) utilized arguments from literature that are crucial for the discussions in this paper. He points out:

> *Gerwitz provides a meaning of social justice centered on the ideas of disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes. Social justice supports a process built on respect, care, recognition, and empathy. Goldfarb and Grunberg define social justice…*

Capper, Theoharis and Sebastian (2006) write about a need to prepare social justice leaders. These authors contend that such leaders will support and teach anti-racist education as they develop anti-racist consciousness. Furthermore, Capper *et al.* (2006:213) argue, "We argue that school leaders need to embody a social justice consciousness within their belief systems or values. This includes needing to possess a deep understanding of power relations and social construction including white privilege, heterosexism, poverty, misogyny and ethnocentrism." Social justice leaders want to build a school grounded on fair practices. Social justice leaders will understand issues of diversity and their existence. However, it is fair only if they ensure their followers understand these as well. Society is based on many inequalities. Capper *et al.* (2006) for example, argue about the need for school leaders to learn how their own racial identity impacts on their leadership practice.

Frattura and Capper (2007) argue that oppression in our society is perpetrated through schools as we usually slot learners in different blocks. For example, it is interesting decades after freedom in South Africa is still divided into affluent and indigent schools. The futures are different in these varying schools. Learners in historically black schools are usually from families who have no other alternative for better perfuming schools. They are trapped in underperforming schools, usually with underqualified or non-qualified teachers. Fraturra and Capper (2007: xxvii) opine as they write about the American society:

> *The population of oppressed or dehumanized students in our schools is growing. If we continue to function in the same manner as we have over the five decades, we will continue to create schools composed of students who belong and those students who do not. To overcome the dismal outcomes of segregated programs, school leaders require clarification of what the current program delivery structure looks like and results in, knowledge of how integrated comprehensive delivery can make a difference…*

School leaders in South Africa have to respond to many inequities that still exist in the school system. Apartheid's influence is still looming large in education as well as in society. Effective leaders will be aware of disparities in schools.

Hereunder the discussion focuses on certain aspects that link explicate Luthuli's leadership and how it can be utilized in schools. The discussion is divided into four aspects which are:

- Spiritual leadership;
- Servant leadership; and
- Participative leadership.

All these are leadership factors found in Luthuli's form of leadership. In the discussion that ensues we look at these as to how they manifested themselves in Luthuli's leadership and how and why school leaders can incorporate utilize these in their own leadership of successful schools.

4. Spiritual Leadership

Frisdiantara and Sahertian (2012) assert that spiritual leadership is related to value-based leadership theories especially relationship oriented and servant leadership. Furthermore, they contend that spiritual leadership has been necessitated by the rampant ills in society. Spirituality is believed to emphasize human aspects such as morality, faith and altruism. Most religions are spiritual although there are people who might agree that they are spiritual but not religious. African traditional religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Judaism are examples of religions that embrace spirituality. Plante (2008:430) points out that spirituality refers to being attentive to what is "sacred and connected to a concept, belief, or higher power greater than oneself". Plante expatiates that the connection could be to God, spiritual models (e.g. Jesus, Mohammad and Buddha), or nature. Sedjaya (2007) states that there are four primary dimensions of spiritual leadership namely; religiousness, interconnectedness, sense of mission and wholeness. Luthuli was a Christian who used his spirituality in leading his people.

Kumalo (2012) argues that it was Luthuli's faith that influenced his growth as a leader. This then implies that Luthuli's spirituality reinforced his leadership which tended to include the traditional democratic leadership as well. Luthuli discovered that being involved in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed as part of a spiritual journey. As a leader Luthuli utilized morality and ethical leadership guided by his spirituality as a highly religious person. All these are factors crucial in building a learning organization. Riaz (2012) argues that a learning organization is a source for spiritual survival and inspires its workers to attain intrinsic motivation factors. These include vision, hope, altruistic love, task involvement and goal identification. Another author (Gleeson, 2003) opines that spiritual leadership begins from the soul. He says it is about helping the school communities to reflection the present as they envision a better future. Spiritual leaders help communities find the right maps. In his acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace prize in 1961 Albert Luthuli said:

> *I did not initiate the struggle to extend the area of human freedom in South Africa; other African patriots – devoted man did so before me. I also, as a Christian and patriot, could not look on while systematic attempts were made, almost in every department of life, to debase the God-factor in man or set a limit beyond which the human being in his black form might not strive to serve his Creator to the best of his ability. To remain neutral in a situation where the laws of the land virtually criticized God for having created men of color was the sort of thing I could not, as a Christian tolerate.*

Clearly, Luthuli here demonstrates that his leadership was guided by human conscience and scripture. He impresses to his audience the deep seated need to be driven by principles and values to lead people towards a worthwhile life. Luthuli, the committed preacher also illustrates the need to be guided by ethics and universal values. However, one does not need to be a Christian to practice spiritual leadership. Various religions embrace the values of spirituality and most religions are based on the values of fairness and morality. Spirituality, especially in times of moral decay experienced in some South African schools can play a huge role. The basis of spiritual leadership is to spread the principles of democracy and equality. In his speech cited above, Luthuli continues to question the Christian missions and church for failing to plough this fairness.

Thompson (2012) points out that spiritual leadership traits and attributes are gaining recognition as effective leadership style for correcting what is wrong with the country's schools. All communities need schools that will produce results. Various leadership styles can be utilized to achieve these results. Thompson (2012: 107) contends:

> *It is an emerging leadership practice that is taking on new importance in twenty first century schools. Spiritual leaders motivate and inspire school stakeholders as well as other organizational leaders to reach difficult goals; this style of leadership is similar to servant leadership.*

Spiritual leaders care about the followers' welfare and they use high values to lead them. "This style of leadership involves motivating and inspiring individuals through a clear vision and agenda that serves the school's needs"

(Thompson 2012:108). Malone and Fry (2003) illustrate why schools need to develop a foundation for learners to meet the 21st century challenges. These authors argue that one of the most important tasks for educational leadership is to put altruistic love at the centre of the educational vision. Schools can and should address aspects such as selfishness, as they lay a foundation for a society sharing nurturing values. Riaz (2012) also points out that there is a relationship between transformational leadership styles of inspirational motivation as well as idealized behavioral influence were related to the school principal's spirituality. Moreover, school principals who identified themselves as spiritual leaders are likely to be characterized by transformational leadership style of inspiration motivation. These are qualities necessary in guiding effective schools. School principals who are spiritual leaders help their followers to find meaning, shed selfishness, live for the other person. It promotes solidarity and value to build the organization.

Fidler (2000) states that recently there has been increasing attention to the ethical principles of management. Sergiovanni (1992) argues that school leaders should be moral leaders as well. Furthermore, Sergiovanni (1992) argues that school leaders are practicing a form of leadership that is based on moral authority but this practice is not acknowledged as leadership. Moral authority is downplayed and the values linked to this are usually deemed unofficial. Fidler (2000) extends the argument further when he posits that in any school there needs to be learning happening amongst staff and learners; this should also be moral learning. Moral leadership is about service for the primary characteristic of a moral leader should be the spirit of service: "he who serves the community most" than "he who dominates the community most" (Anello, no date). Moral leaders empower others to meet the needs of humanity hence a school principal who is a moral leader will ensure that school programmes meet the needs of the community around the school. The school contributes to the society and staff members are empowered just for that; to serve the community.

The school leaders today require certain qualities to survive the challenging demands of their jobs. Ramsey (1999) points out that most school administrators are stuck and that they are usually limited to function strictly as managers. He adds that managers make do, monitor and that being a manager is hard work and not much fun. However, leaders energies and excite the organization and the people in it by showing what it can become. "Leaders deal with visions, dreams and possibilities" (Ramsey 1999:7). Many writers have tried to look for the best leadership practices and have discovered that today's schools require shared leadership and shared decision making all the time (Kotter, 1996; Pretorius, 1998; Singh & Manser, 2000). However, employees cannot share decisions or visions in institutions unless there is high morale in the work place. Ramsey (1999) perceives employee morale as one of the cornerstones of productivity and contends that while some managers might care less about morale, effective leaders will. Good morale results in a strong sense of common purpose, mutual support and unified effort. Yet immoral behavior is detrimental to organizational growth.

Wharton (2000) points out that immoral behavior persist in organizations because of two things: a failure to see that the essence of leadership is moral behavior and a misunderstanding of how moral actions arise and are inculcated in the workplace. Kirshenbaum (1995) also avers that morals and values are embodied by character education. Moreover, Kirshenbaum states that character traits and goals of character education include respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline and loyalty. Another goal of morality is to produce autonomous individuals who know those moral values and are committed to acting in a manner consistent with them (Kirschenbaum, 1995).

"Leadership is not about 'technical' (or job) knowledge, it is about having followers, those who willingly work their hearts out to get great work done" (Wharton, 2000:9). Furthermore, Wharton contends that moral leadership is about engendering respect within the organization top to bottom. According to Wharton four qualities are contributors to immoral leadership behavior:

(i) *Behavioral drivers* – sometimes leaders have this need to want to win, to be loved, avoid conflict, to be perfect and be successful.

(ii) *Style* – style factors affect leadership negatively when leaders impose their leadership styles on others to get things done rather than as a way to understand and better work with others

(iii) *Habit* – a leader can act immorally by utilizing habits. These may be positive or negative. Small habits can be destructive to organizations.

(iv) *Intention* – here a leader acts consciously and intentionally in ways that harm others.

Yet Luthuli strived for moral leadership that aspired to serve others at all times. His spiritual intent was to be a servant leader who wanted a better life for others. Committed school leaders will do this as they serve the school parents, the community and society.

5. Servant Leadership

It is documented in history how Luthuli became an ardent servant leader. This was witnessed especially by those who lived with him in his ancestral home of Groutville in KwaZulu-Natal. His magnanimity and generosity proved that he was indeed a servant leader who was prepared to serve his people. Sithole (2012) asserts that Luthuli became a conscientious leader right from the beginning of his career as a leader. This author also argues that it was Luthuli's strong conviction that life must be about a service to humanity. Luthuli resigned from a teaching position and took up chieftainship among the Amakholwa people at a huge cut of his salary. Yet his innate propensity to serve others soon made him an unyielding, selfless leader.

Pillay (2012:165) concurs with the above when he cites Ela Ghandi who postulates:

> He wasn't there just to win, to overthrow apartheid: he was someone who wanted to bring back dignity in his people, to uplift life in his people. He organized the cane growers, and went out and encouraged people to use the land, start little farms, beginning to become self-sufficient, and he did that in a big way; he went and encouraged people. It was like bringing back some dignity, some self-confidence in the people, that we do have some power in us.

Effective leaders would have the aspirations of their followers in mind. In schools leaders can use these virtues as they build a culture of commitment and a climate of collaboration. Inkosi Luthuli was always conscious of his role as a leader. He sums this when he says, "… a chief is primarily a servant of his people." Kenneth Kaunda (2005) cites these words in his Luthuli Memorial Lecture as he points out that Luthuli always had unfailing courtesy towards others. There are several authors who argue that Luthuli was prepared to be deposed from his (Amakholwa[2]) chieftaincy because he wanted to be a servant of his people (Sithole & Mkhize, 2000). "Luthuli had taught the ANC activists and leaders the lesson that real leaders must be ready to sacrifice all for the freedom of their people" (Sithole & Mkhize 2000: 82). Dames (2008) also perceives Luthuli as an exemplary leader who demonstrated ethical leadership through his life and decisions.

Luthuli's political consciousness enabled him to see himself as a servant of the oppressed people that he led in the Congress. This servant leadership in schools can be linked to the idea of service to all learners irrespective of socio-economic background. Teachers are leaders and true leaders are servants of society. Moreover, to be a true African leader one has to be a true servant of the society they live in. Makhanya refers to servant leadership as an increased service to others, "a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community and the sharing of power in decision making". The person who coined this term, *servant leadership* Robert Greenleaf, (2002) describes *servant-leadership* as a management philosophy which sees the leader a servant first before s/he can contribute to the well-being of the people and community. The important aspect of servant-leadership is that it underscores the importance of serving first before one leads. Servant-leadership defeats the notion of individualism hence earlier I have portrayed how isolationism can defeat the ends of collaboration. Committed teachers lead with a sense of moral purpose necessary for achieving schools. Schools where there is collaboration, participative or shared leadership might get teachers who practice the common and accepted form of leadership. Effective leaders will try to attain a level of this leadership that is shared by employees.

This is akin to some African leadership models. Masango (2002) writes about how in Africa leadership becomes a function to be shared by all villagers or community members rather than leadership vested in one person. The African villagers are usually dependent upon the encouragement and support of the leader. S/he was the voice of the village and the villagers represented him/her. The role of the leader was crucial in sustaining the life of the village. Masango (2002) aptly writes:

> The whole aim of an effective or life-giving leader is to uplift the villagers/community in such a way that they progress. This will help people to express their own gifts within the village/community. As leaders share their gift of leadership in return the people will honor them. As they continue to share in African religious ceremonies, which are an essential part of the way of each person, the villagers/community will join celebration.

As servant leaders we need to ask ourselves persistent questions. An idle man will never ask the pertinent questions however, a wise human being will constantly ask himself or herself, "what are you doing for others?'" How can I help my neighbor? Like in the Bible's parable of a Good Samaritan. Servant leaders are selfless, they focus on others' needs, they are happy when others succeed because they are aware that the success of one of the group is a success for everyone. This is the basis of *ubuntu*. In my research on *ubuntu* I have drawn what I refer to as the five P's of *ubuntu*

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[2] *These were the Zulu Christian converts stationed at Groutville.*

which I also feel are relevant to servant leadership. These are:

- **People-centeredness**- *ubuntu* emphasizes the role of the people within the village, the organization. Without an interest in people *ubuntu* cannot be realized;
- **Permeable walls**- communication in the village is not restricted and the walls are not opaque. All the members are able to communicate with one another without fear;
- **Partisanship** – one of the most positive factors of *ubuntu* philosophy is loyalty. People communicate freely and they are made to feel closer to the village;
- **Progeny**- *Ubuntu* leadership promotes collective decision making. However, under this, effective leadership is respected and the leader is respected; and
- **Production** – when the above characterize the village, production is guaranteed. The village prospers when its members enjoy respect, loyalty and good leadership.

Effective schools and successful principals would find the above useful for their committed staff. These are all linked to success. Success leads to excellence and mastery. Any servant leader wants to achieve the best primarily for the group, the organization and for himself or herself as an individual. Servant leaders model this success; they model the innate goodness that we require. Our schools need this service. Poor parents with no social and cultural capital need committed teachers. Committed teachers will close the achievement gap between indigent and affluent children. This is even more crucial in the formative years. In his study Msila (2012) concludes by stating that there is necessity to raise working class children's confidence and close the achievement gap that will widen when compared to middle class children in later years. Furthermore, Msila cites Hurn who avers that inferior schooling compounds the initial handicaps of the learners and leads them directly to the perpetuation of poverty and inequality. Teachers can make the difference.

6. Participative Leadership

Sithole (2012) contends that Luthuli believed in a people-cantered program of action in the struggle against apartheid. Furthermore, Sithole also shows how Luthuli was committed to be a leader who includes all people and ready to serve in a non-sexist democratic society that would uphold the human rights of all people. Raymond Suttner (2011) summarizes Luthuli's participatory or democratic leadership:

Part of Luthuli's power as a leader lay in listening carefully before offering advice or deciding on a *course of action. He was willing to learn and grew all the time. Luthuli was open to ideas of a range of people. He was non-sectarian and refused to be a prisoner of "isms". While disagreeing on some key issues he nevertheless had close relationships with the Liberal Party of Alan Paton. His closest confidante was communist leader. Moses Kotane. Luthuli rejected African exclusivism or chauvinism and believed in a broad African nationalism that would grow ever-wider in its embrace.*

These qualities of listening, inclusivity, recognizing and respecting diversity are all crucial in any working school. School leaders today encounter environments that have all sorts of challenges. Schools tend to have strong union members and school leaders need to act consistently at all times by acknowledging that whist they need to lead their teachers, they also need to learn from them as well. The latter is one of the critical factors of effective schools. Miao, Newman, Schwartz and Xu (2013) link participative leadership to organizational commitment. Miao et al also define participative leadership as a leadership style by which a leader involves followers in the process of problem solving and decision making. Somech (2006) opines that participation is critical for a team's ability to turn new ideas and individually held knowledge into innovative procedures, services and products. Furthermore, Somech argues that teachers in participative environments increase ideas, materials and methods which to a higher quality of instruction. "According to a path-goal theory, members under participative leadership are likely to strive to express opinions and propose solutions because they may well reckon that the leader and their team members expect them to contribute to the task, and meeting these expectations is valuable" (Somech, 2006:781).

All these are crucial for organizational commitment. When members are committed to an organization, they want to follow the organizational objectives. Commitment has three basic components; identification, loyalty and autonomy and impact (Somech, 2006). Furthermore, Somech points out that participative leaders provide teachers the opportunity to be involved in and to exert influence on decision-making processes. Their participation is believed to promote commitment to decisions that are made and increase their willingness to carry them out in their work. Cherry (*online*) refers to participative leadership as democratic leadership style. All members' roles under this style are crucial for higher productivity and better contributions from group members. Some of the characteristics of democratic leadership are:

- Group members are encouraged to share idea and opinions even though the leader retains the final say over decisions;
- Members of the group feel more engaged in the process; and

- Creativity is encouraged and rewarded.

With respect to schools, Bush (2007) draws similar arguments as he points out that participative leadership styles are underpinned by three assumptions:

- Participation will increase school effectiveness;
- Participation is justified by democratic principles; and
- In the context of site-based management, leadership is potentially available to any legitimate stakeholder.

In South Africa the current system of education promotes participative models. The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 supports school policies that are underpinned by democracy, and human rights culture. One of the key points in SASA is to ensure that there is partnership in education. "This means that the State, teachers, parents, learners, the private sector and members of the community must all accept their responsibilities to make the education system work as well as possible" (DoE, 1997).School leaders have to translate this participative culture in their schools as they ensure that leadership is shared at all times.

7. Conclusion

This paper shows the strengths in the eight leader of the ANC's leadership style. Based on spiritual leadership Luthuli used this to lead at a very tumultuous time in the history of his country as well as his organization, the African National Congress. A great leader who used values and moral consciousness to lead his people. At a time when South African schools are so bereft with leadership challenges it would help to use people management if schools want to boost teacher morale and subsequently attain better results. There is no doubt that Luthuli's form of leadership entailed a vision. As a leader Luthuli knew exactly what he needed to accomplish. He declared that leaders could not be spiritual and yet forget about the welfare of fellow people. As a spiritual leader he had conscience and commitment. These are all qualities pertinent for all school leaders. In their districts school leaders should `sow commitment by adding qualities of democratic leadership, servant leadership and spiritual leadership. Depending on contexts, these can be combined with other styles such as directive leadership and other transactional forms of leadership. An effective leader will create effective followership. Many ailing schools lack this. Yet, during his time Luthuli's followers often burst into one song:

Somlandela, somlandela uLuthuli,	*We will follow, follow Luthuli,*
Somlandela yonke indawo,	*Everywhere he goes we'll follow,*
Noma eyaphina somlandela.	*Wherever he goes we'll follow.*

There are many schools who will loathe singing this song, because they do not identify with their school management. Yet effective schools will glean from philosophies such as that of Luthuli. They will always use creative beliefs to rescue the future of families who hang their hopes on schools and education.

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