

Nelson Mandela's defence: A psychological capital documentary analysis

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DATES:

Received: 29 Nov. 2013

Revised: 29 Jan. 2014

Accepted: 17 Mar. 2014

KEYWORDS:

HERO behaviour; positive psychology; PsyCap; African National Congress; ANC

HOW TO CITE:

Van Wyk R. Nelson Mandela's defence: A psychological capital documentary analysis. *S Afr J Sci.* 2014;110(11/12), Art. #2013-0366, 7 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/sajs.2014/20130366>

This qualitative documentary analysis examines Nelson Mandela's defence statement at the Rivonia Trial, Pretoria Supreme Court, on 20 April 1964. The defence document is analysed through the psychological capital lens, depicting themes that support the constructs of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism. Psychological capital characteristics played a major role in the initial non-violent policies of negotiation. The inevitable establishment of Umkhonto we Sizwe followed, as a result of the increased restrictions and unwillingness of government to negotiate and collaborate. Mandela showed a determined spirit to unite the country. The discussion gives insight into Mandela's authentic psychological capital leadership under difficult political and personal circumstances. Some implications are indicated in adopting Mandela's psychological characteristics for personal reform.

When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both.

Nelson Mandela

Introduction

The African National Congress (ANC) was banned in 1952 and unbanned on 11 February 1990. With the banning of the ANC, the South African public was deprived of the views of the ANC and its leaders. During the 38-year ban, the publication of Nelson Mandela's photo was prohibited, and the South African public was given one-sided, apartheid-supporting propaganda.¹ With the bar on information on the ANC, the South African public was deprived of the detail of Mandela's defence statement during the Rivonia Trial in 1964. Because of the restriction and censoring of Mandela's correspondence during his imprisonment, knowledge of his personal views were restricted to the outside world.² However, the world and South Africans soon became more informed after his release from prison. Millions of people globally protested against his imprisonment and applauded his release, signalling the end of apartheid and the transition to democracy.³ Mandela is probably one of the most distinguished modern-day leaders.⁴ He captured the imagination of the world, resisted the moral decline of South Africa⁵ and made a global historical impact^{2,6}.

Mandela's imprisonment did not jeopardise his cause and will to unite the country⁶, nor did the apartheid government manage to break his spirit⁷. His prime years were spent in prison, and he gave up 5 years of his law practice to defend himself and others accused in the Treason Trials.⁴ Without bitterness⁸, embracing forgiveness⁵, he purposefully engaged in peaceful resolutions to unify opposing parties, and, in this way, embarrassed his enemies⁵. He aspired to create a democratic, race-free South Africa, by operating through a policy of forgiveness^{5,9} and providing peace and stability to the new democracy⁷. Mandela chose to walk the road of forgiveness despite his 27 years of imprisonment and harassment of his family.⁸ Mandela's vision of reconciliation, notwithstanding hostility from opposing factions,¹⁰ emphasised his positive behaviour. His ethical behaviour is regarded as functioning at the highest level, as he demonstrated extraordinary proactive leadership.¹¹ His actions were co-evolutionary, based on values that strengthened the effectiveness of the South African society as a whole.¹¹

It is argued that Mandela's extraordinary psychological capital (PsyCap) leadership and dignity led to the positive reforms that took place at Robben Island.¹² The purpose of this study was to explore the PsyCap displayed by Mandela as a person before his imprisonment, as depicted in his defence statement.¹³ Mandela's strategic leadership – based on reconciliation – contributed to the peaceful transition in South Africa.^{14,15} He became a symbol of endurance in the face of oppression.⁹ Notwithstanding worldwide accolades and joint receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize with FW de Klerk in 1993¹⁶, Mandela did not regard himself as a messiah, but rather as an ordinary leader exposed to extraordinary circumstances¹⁷.

Cascio and Luthans¹² argue that the nurturing of positive resources in the form of PsyCap contributed to the metamorphosis of both prisoners and warders on Robben Island. The prisoners prevailed by creating transformation through positive psychological self-governance, which changed the attitude of warders towards them. Mandela took part in an effort of collective forgiveness on Robben Island and was central in developing political education for prisoners.⁴ Different forms of authentic leadership empowered the political prisoners to convert the 'hell hole' to a freedom symbol.¹² In the current study, authentic PsyCap leadership themes were investigated by examining the defence statement of Mandela at the Rivonia Trial¹³, as he dedicated and sacrificed his life to the struggle¹⁷.

Problem statement and objective of the study

Although Nelson Mandela is one of the most admired historical leaders, not much research has been done on his leadership style.² There is also a lack of research on positive behaviour in the functioning of governments.¹⁸ As far as could be established, no positive behaviour studies have been done on the ANC leadership, with the exception of the metamorphosis of Robben Island.¹² Although the ANC was not governing the country at the time of the Rivonia Trial, they had their own governance infrastructure. Most studies on PsyCap are quantitative, using Luthans et al.'s¹⁹ PCQ24 measure; however, qualitative investigations would improve our understanding of the

phenomenon.²⁰ The current study is the first qualitative investigation into the phenomenon of the strategic PsyCap leadership of Mandela before his imprisonment on Robben Island.

The objective of this study was to qualitatively examine Mandela's¹³ statement against the PsyCap concepts of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism (HERO). This paper adds to the investigation of Cascio and Luthans¹² regarding evidence of the positive role that PsyCap played in the alleviation of the oppressive environment at Robben Island. The oppressive environment existed long before Mandela was imprisoned. The defence argument of Mandela on 20 April 1964¹³ was examined to uncover Mandela's positive psychological attempts to amicably resolve the oppression of Africans. This analysis should give more insight into the authentic leadership and PsyCap HERO actions of Nelson Mandela, despite the impossible political circumstances at the time.

PsyCap theory

While PsyCap has not been linked to leadership behaviour, with the exception of the Cascio and Luthans¹² study, many positive associations with psychological well-being have been found in organisations; these associations are evident in employee well-being²¹, overall well-being²², greater work engagement²³, enhanced academic performance²⁴, work satisfaction²⁵, organisational commitment^{26,27}, maintenance of a safety climate²⁸, job performance²⁵, organisational citizenship²⁹, low counterproductive behaviour and cynicism²⁹, fewer symptoms of depression³⁰, life satisfaction³¹ and authentic leadership^{12,32}.

PsyCap is regarded as the cognitive component and positive psychological state encompassing hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism.^{19,25} It has been indicated that the individual and collective PsyCap of the political prisoners at Robben Island contributed to the effective metamorphosis of prison life.¹² This PsyCap behaviour of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism, depicted by the acronym HERO, was demonstrated through the different coping strategies of the prisoners who disrupted the oppressive situation. The individual HERO concepts are explained below.

Hope

Hope consists of two forms of goal-directed behaviour: agency (willpower) and pathways (waypower) in fulfilling objectives³³ within a specific historical context³⁴. Dispositional optimistic hope increases a person's expectancy of achieving desired goals.³³ An individual maintains hopeful behaviour through interaction of agency (the will) and pathways (the way). Hope is the positive attribute of developing pathways and goal-directed behaviour through perseverance.^{19,22} Hope is regarded as a motivational construct³⁵ that is generally related to positive well-being, effective performance³⁶, psychological strength and optimal health³⁷.

Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as personal agency and confidence in performing directed behaviour³⁸ as well as an optimistic appraisal of the ability to execute desired behaviour.³⁹ It is the confidence in being able to invest the necessary input to succeed in difficult tasks^{19,22} and achieve goals.⁴⁰ Self-efficacy probably plays a mediating role in the belief in one's abilities, the motivation to produce outcomes⁴¹ and psychological well-being⁴². A person with high efficacy is likely to effectively challenge problematic external factors.⁴³

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to sustain and recover, despite problematic circumstances.¹⁹ It is the propensity to pull through, despite demanding obstacles.⁴⁴ Resilience promotes an adaptive response that supports positive functioning, self-repair and promptness in dealing with challenges.⁴⁵ Resilience adds to an individual's successful control of a situation⁴⁶, dynamic sense-making during a crisis⁴⁷ and adaptation to and recovery from an adverse event⁴⁸.

Optimism

Optimism manifests in positive attributes towards future success¹⁹ and in a disposition to expect positive outcomes⁴⁹. It is an inclination to attribute success to internal positive traits and a refusal to relent during temporary external hardship.⁴⁹ Optimists presuppose that events will turn out positively.⁵⁰ Pessimists regard negative events as permanent internal attributes.⁵¹ Optimism is associated with mental and physical health^{52,53} as well as longevity⁵⁴ and proactive healthy behaviour⁵².

Research questions

Two questions were asked: (1) Were there PsyCap factors involved in Mandela's¹³ defence statement in the form of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism? (2) What are the underlying themes that support the presence of PsyCap factors in Mandela's defence?

Method

Procedure

A qualitative content analysis – referred to as a documentary analysis – was performed of the historical document, the Nelson Mandela Rivonia Trial defence statement.⁵⁵ The content analysis was done using PsyCap theory as a benchmark. The primary method of inquiry was qualitative, chosen for its interpretive and inductive nature in an attempt to elicit meaning from the particular event.⁵⁶ The investigation was done from a positivist objective paradigm as the researcher and the participant did not interact.^{56,57} This approach implies a realist's ontology regarding relationships in the world and an objective epistemology of getting to know phenomena.⁵⁸ Such a paradigm requires the researcher to be objective and free from cultural values.⁵⁹

Documentary analysis was chosen because: (1) the defence statement is publically available on the ANC's website,¹³ (2) it was the only way to gain information concerning the event, (3) it lessens ethical issues as the document is in the public domain and (4) the process of data collection could not be influenced.⁵⁵ The defence statement of Nelson Mandela¹³ was used in a single documentary analysis, which complied with the principles of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and transparency of meaning, as it is the original comprehensive statement.⁶⁰

A data extraction sheet was used to systematically capture the different PsyCap HERO themes by means of content analysis.⁵⁵ The content of the argument was categorised according to the themes⁶¹ depicted in the PsyCap theoretical model. The framing of data into a theoretical model prevents under-emphasis of key concepts.⁵⁵ The analysis and interpretation took place through the identification of reappearing themes and categorisation of topics, and by demonstrating incidences that brought about change. These incidences were compared with the PsyCap theory.⁶²

Data analysis

A content analysis of the transcript of the Rivonia Trial was done. Content analysis of the defence text was done systematically by coding and quantifying information.⁶³ The content analysis was of an interpretive nature, and focused on the implicit meaning in the transcript.⁵⁹ Codes in the transcript of the defence statement were categorised, analysing the meaning within the context of the PsyCap HERO constructs. Coding was done by identifying constant phrases, which were classified into themes⁵⁶ that were categorised under four main PsyCap constructs. Categories were judged by means of internal homogeneity – reflecting the same implicit meaning – as well as by external homogeneity.⁵⁶ The internal and external differentiation indicated the distinctness of categories. Certain reappearing themes were identified and categorised according to the PsyCap constructs of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism. The number of incidents of each theme is shown in brackets in the following sections.

Hope

In hope there is a deep conviction to contribute to the freedom of people. Although there were many attempts at peaceful negotiation and discussions with government, no settlement was reached. Instead more legislation that restricted the rights of Africans was brought to bear (3). Thirty years of failed peaceful negotiations inevitably led to overt action with a policy of no bloodshed (6). Military and administrative training was organised outside the country to prepare for future governance of the country (6). Siding with communists was by no means an acceptance of their ideology – it was a welcoming of their support for freedom from apartheid (5). The objective was to correct the economic imbalance between white supremacy coupled with high economic living standards and African poverty and misery (3). The further aim was to improve the health conditions and living standards of Africans, preventing malnutrition and disease (3). Figure 1 depicts the themes that support hope.

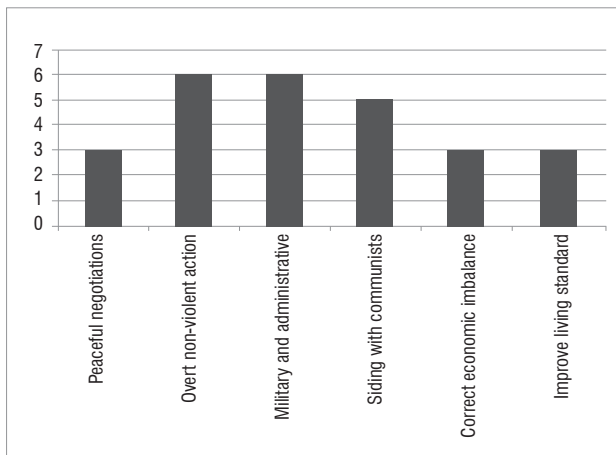


Figure 1: Number of occurrences of themes supporting hope.

Efficacy

In the defence document, consistent efficacy principles were contrasted with the false impressions created by the state. The ANC was founded to defend the rights of African people. The policy was consistently one of non-violence and non-communism (9). The establishment of Umkhonto we Sizwe was an answer to government's constant mobilisation of armed forces and violent actions. The ANC was obliged to depart from their non-violence policy of 50 years to controlled violence of economic sabotage without bloodshed, as a result of unsuccessful negotiations and increasingly restrictive laws (10). The ANC's ideology did not imply the acceptance of Marxism; it was one of African nationalism, liberation, freedom and harmonisation of all people (10). In Mandela's ideology, he saw himself as an African patriot. While influenced by Eastern Marxist thoughts of advancing the poor, Mandela was also an admirer of the democratic parliamentary system of the West. Mandela's political formula was objective and impartial in forming a non-racial state (7). Figure 2 depicts the efficacy themes.

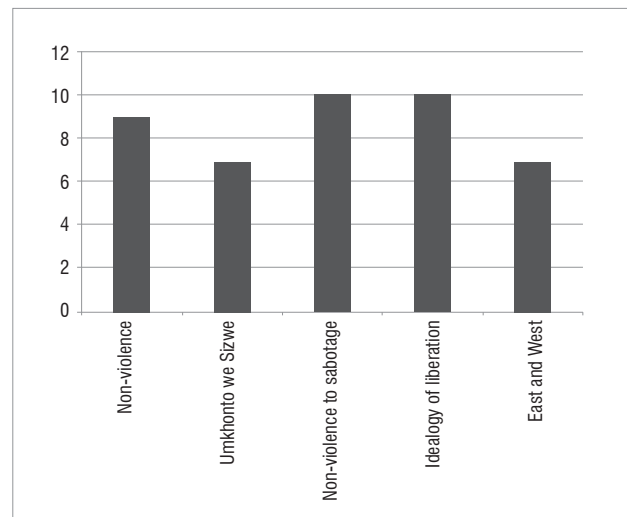


Figure 2: Number of occurrences of themes supporting efficacy.

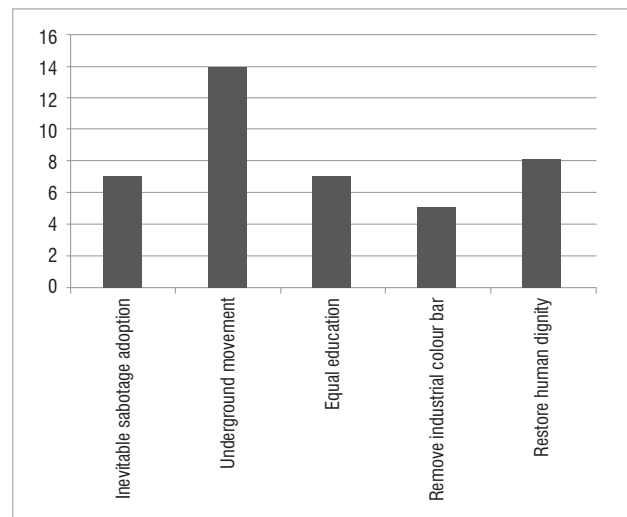


Figure 3: Number of occurrences of themes supporting resilience.

Resilience

The 30 years of non-violent passive resistance led to increased harsh reactions from government. Thousands were imprisoned, there were many deaths of followers (such as in the Sharpeville incident) as well as proclamations of states of emergency. The ANC inevitably reacted by going underground after being banned, and operated by means of controlled violence, i.e. stay-aways and sabotage (14). Mandela explained that the unavoidable adoption of sabotage was not reckless, it was rather a sober assessment of the political situation of oppression and exploitation (7). The ANC stood for the promotion of equal education (7), removal of the industrial colour bar that reserved better jobs for whites only (5), the restoration of human dignity and family life, and the enhancement of moral standards of Africans (8). The resilience themes are depicted in Figure 3.

Optimism

Notwithstanding circumstances at the time, the policy of the ANC had an optimistic theme. The aim was to establish a non-dominant political dispensation to preserve a South Africa for all its people (8). Mandela took personal accountability for passive and active reaction with the underlying aim of the prevention of loss of life (4). The inevitable adoption of violence as part of ANC policy was to avoid civil war (10). Financial sources supporting the ANC, the struggle and Umkhonto we Sizwe were initially internal; from 1962, funding was sourced externally in Africa and internationally (5). The ANC's vision was to create equal political rights and dignity for all South Africans (9). Figure 4 illustrates the optimistic themes.

The individual PsyCap HERO themes are summarised in Figure 5.

Figure 6 indicates the aims of the negotiation strategies that progressed from non-violent negotiation to inevitable overt action and economic sabotage. The purpose was to acquire equal political, economic and educational rights, restore human dignity of Africans and create a non-racial democratic South Africa.

Discussion

An explanation of how PsyCap HERO themes played a role in the perseverance of Mandela and the ANC has been given. Neither Mandela's imprisonment nor the banning of the ANC could undermine his spirit and drive to unite the country.^{6,7} PsyCap also played a large

role in the positive reforms and metamorphosis at Robben Island.¹² The apparent PsyCap characteristics and strategic leadership of Mandela^{14,15} seemed to also have played a major role in the peaceful transition in post-apartheid South Africa.

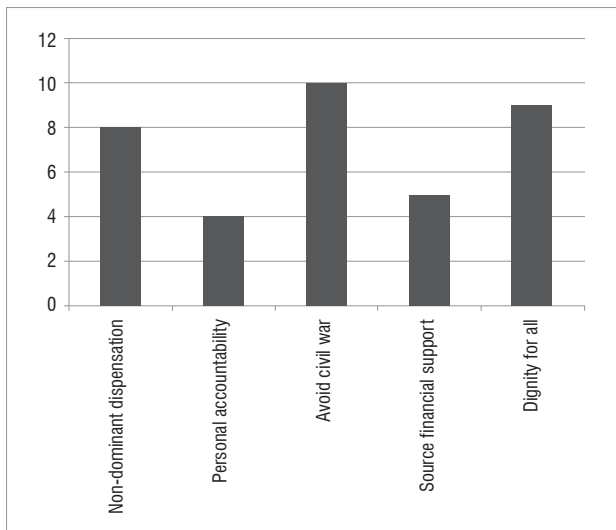


Figure 4: Number of occurrences of themes supporting optimism.

Different themes were identified in each of the PsyCap HERO fields. Hope, depicting the expectancy of achieving desired goals,³³ was pursued by trying to improve the economic imbalance and living standards. This pursuit was initially non-violent, but, when met by government's stricter legislation, the ANC sided with the communists (not their ideology), and were supported by military and administrative training.

Efficacy, seen as the personal agency of desired behaviour,^{38,39} was evident in the aim to form a non-racial state. This ideal was mainly supported by the belief in maintaining non-violent action, which developed into non-violent protest and sabotage. This ideal was disillusioned by the government's retaliation by violent mobilisation of armed forces, which inevitably led to the development of an ideology of liberation and establishment of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Resilience epitomises being adaptive and an ability to recover despite difficult circumstances.^{19,44} After constantly being met by violent government reaction and strict legislations, new strategies were formed, by mobilising an underground movement. Political oppression and exploitation was met with sabotage, organised stay-aways, insisting on equal education, removal of the industrial colour bar and ultimately restoring human dignity.

Optimism refers to an ability to optimise future success.¹⁹ Optimism was apparent in striving to create a political system that acknowledges the dignity of all people, establishing a non-dominant dispensation. The aim was always to avoid civil war. Because of the lack of resources and the high ideals, financial support for the ANC and Umkhonto we Sizwe was sourced nationally and, from 1962, internationally. Through all endeavours, Mandela was always prepared to take personal accountability for decisions made.

A summary of a combination of the main themes identified in the four PsyCap HERO fields is depicted in Figure 7.

Figure 7 emphasises Mandela's strife for a non-racial South Africa, to acknowledge the human dignity of Africans, as well as to establish equal political and economic rights through peaceful negotiation.

Implications and future research

The advantage of using documentary evidence lies in its unbiased, non-reactive nature.^{64,65} An ethical advantage is the current public availability⁵⁵ of the complete historical document of Mandela's personal defence, available on the ANC website. The defence statement of Nelson Mandela is regarded as an aspirational document of the ANC at that point in time. It is considered to be an aspirational document because it deliberately states strategies, policies, objectives and values.⁵⁵ Credibility and transferability were confirmed as suggested by Mayan⁵⁶. The credibility of the classification of arguments that support the four PsyCap constructs of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism is founded in the transferability of the findings to the Robben Island situation described by Cascio and Luthans¹².

A limitation of the documentary analysis is that the researcher could be biased and subjective in the interpretation of the document.^{55,64} The analysis was also not followed up with interviews or case studies, as suggested by Abbott et al.⁵⁵, because of its historical nature. Although

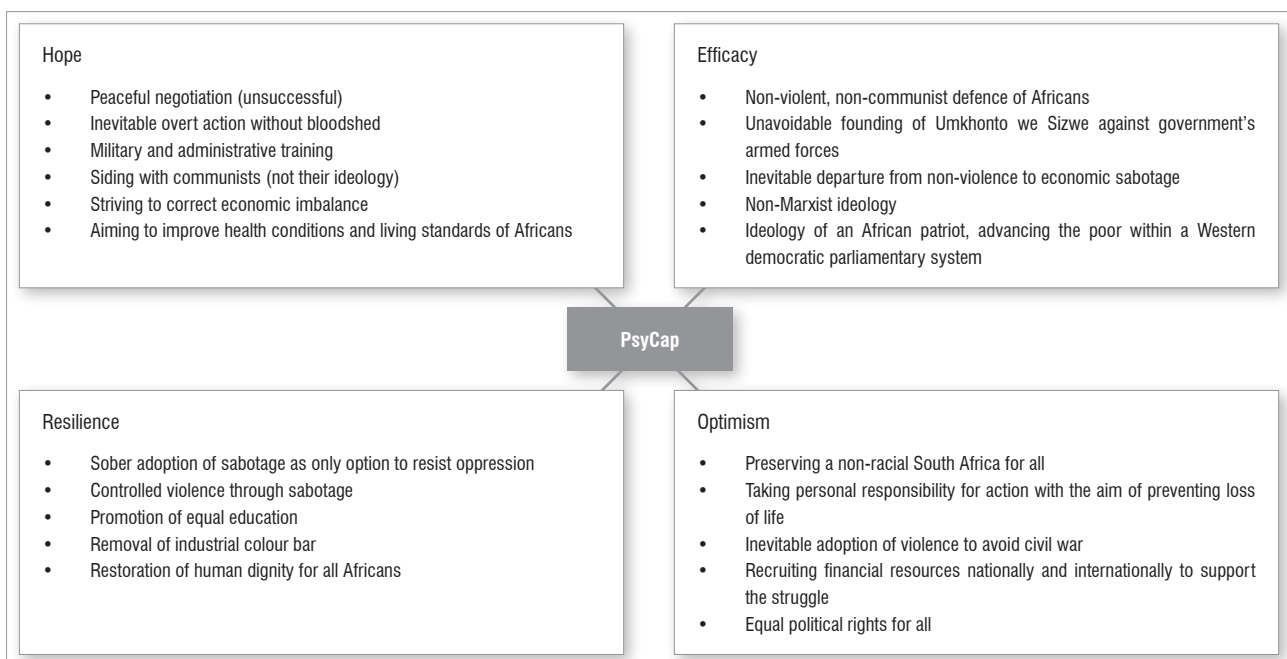


Figure 5: Psychological capital (PsyCap) HERO (hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism) themes in Nelson Mandela's Rivonia Trial defence statement.

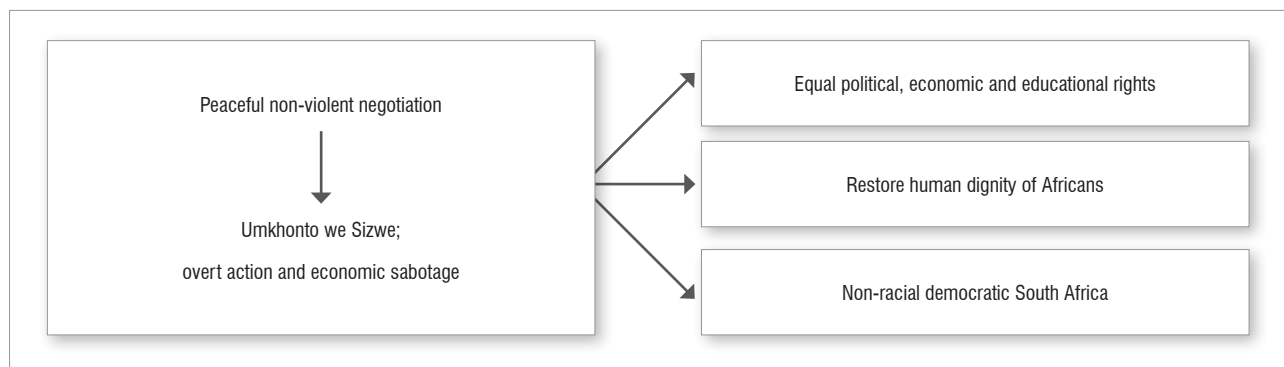


Figure 6: Aims of negotiation strategies.

the Mandela¹³ defence document gives a good overview of his perspectives at the time, more documents on his views at that point may have delivered more insight. However, as far as could be established, such documents before his 27 years of imprisonment are not available. A future cross-sectional study, comparing speeches before and after his release, could shed more light on similarities or differences regarding PsyCap features. Future research should compare the concepts of the main arguments by Mandela concerning the aims of the ANC and the envisioned future of South Africa. Further studies could also investigate the role of PsyCap in Mandela's positive reform actions after his release.

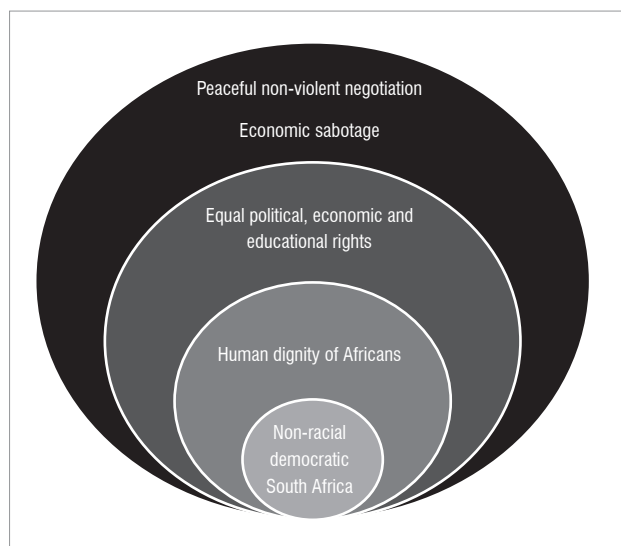


Figure 7: Main themes of the negotiation strategies.

Implications for leadership add to the argument of Cascio and Luthans¹² that positive resources should be cultivated in oppressive circumstances. The PsyCap displayed at the Rivonia Trial that contributed to transformation at Robben Island should be embraced and ploughed back into building the future of South Africa. Management should strive to incorporate the PsyCap features displayed by Mandela in business. Leaders would gain by nurturing in themselves and others the HERO behaviour displayed by Mandela. Mac Maharaj, who was imprisoned with Mandela, referred to Mandela as a leader who all of us could aspire to become.⁶⁶ These findings give insight and direction in developing PsyCap characteristics.

Conclusion

This analysis assists in gaining insight into the PsyCap HERO values that may have driven historical decisions that led to the first democratic general election in South Africa, in 1994. This analysis helps us to understand the reasoning of Mandela through a theoretical lens of PsyCap despite adverse circumstances. Inherent PsyCap HERO behaviour made it possible for Mandela to conclude both his Rivonia Trial¹³ and his first

public speech after his release from prison⁶⁷ with a statement reflecting goodwill for all South Africans:

I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunity. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But, if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

The main findings depict an ideal to form a non-racial South Africa, in which the dignity as well as equal political and economic rights of all Africans is protected through peaceful negotiation. Leadership should take cognisance of the PsyCap HERO characteristics employed by Mandela to overcome challenging political obstacles.

Acknowledgements

My appreciation to the anonymous reviewers who contributed to improving the quality of this article.

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