Managing change as a critical success factor for humankind

Lessons from Mandela and De Klerk

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As Fite (in Lee 1949:307) once said: "I have always avoided the word 'concept', what it suggests to me is a poker-chip. I cherish the primitive notion that when a man talks to me, say about horses, and wishes me to see what he has in mind, he should bring along a horse, or a picture of a horse, or at least of a zebra if he happens to have one".

ABSTRACT

Through this article¹ the author seeks to reflect a practitioner's perspective on managing change as a critical success factor for humankind, with reference to lessons from Mandela and De Klerk. This article therefore advocates the view that the pursuit of knowledge through the method of public discussion should, true to the practice of the medieval universities, be informed by all forms of knowledge. As such the author deemed it appropriate to solicit the wisdom of the former President F.W. de Klerk, through the F.W. de Klerk Foundation and the wisdom of the custodian of the legacy of the late former President Mandela, the Nelson Mandela Foundation on the topic.

INTRODUCTION

As William James once remarked in 1890: "Almost every civilized language except English has two commonplace words for knowledge: knowledge-of-acquaintance and knowledge-about. This distinction, simple as it is, nevertheless is exceedingly important, "(as) knowledge-of-acquaintance comes from direct experience of fact and situation (and) knowledge-about is the product of reflective and abstract thinking" Mayo (in Lee 1949:309).

In 1994 South Africa pulled off one of the remarkable change processes in recent history, culminating in the birth of the Constitution based democratic order. Nelson Mandela, the first President of a democratic South Africa described this change process thus: "I never lost hope that this transformation would occur. Not only because of the great heroes I have already cited, but because of the courage of the ordinary men and women of my country... I have walked

that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken the moment to rest to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended" (Nelson Mandela's Autobiography – Long Walk to Freedom, 1994:615–617).

Coincidentally after 20 years of democracy in South Africa, the last apartheid President, Mr F.W. de Klerk (who partnered Nelson Mandela in the birth of a democratic dispensation had this to say at the Maropeng Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site, where imprints of his feet were made in clay: "The ability to manage change is still a critical success factor for mankind. 20 years ago we South Africans were able to manage one of the greatest change processes of the 20th Century. We transformed our society from the division and isolation of the past to a new era based on inclusivity and non-racial constitutional democracy... However we have also learned that the process of change never ends... We continue to be faced by major national challenges that will require further fundamental changes in our society... When I imprint my foot here today, I shall do so in the awareness that I am continuing the long match of change that we began right at the Cradle of Humankind so many *eons* ago. However, my footprint will also indicate that this is an unfinished journey on our way to a better, more just and more equal future for all our people" (F.W. de Klerk at the Cradle of Humankind 29 July 2014).

Therefore some of the questions we have to answer as South Africans, especially the higher education institutions and public service administrators are: how best do we take forward this long walk that has not yet ended, this unfinished journey on our way to a better, more just and equal future for all our people? How do we, as South Africans, take forward this journey in dealing with issues of inequality, unemployment and poverty? Can a university or any public institution remain relevant and get the trust of the public if it does not address these issues as part of its mission? Can any public service institution steer itself into this journey, with all its uncertainties, over the next twenty years without a clearly defined change plan?

CONTEXT

The South African mixed economic system can be characterised as a free market economy where the private sector works hand in hand with the state whose character is developmental in nature. This means that the state seeks to play an active role in the economy of the country in order to compensate for the historical imbalances in the economy and also to cushion the most vulnerable members of society against the negative effects of the free market economy. The Public Service, being an administrative arm of the government of the day, ought to be playing a crucial role in the execution of the mandate of the state.

In regard to the democratisation of the state and society, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994: 125) *inter alia* envisaged the Public Service that is composed in such a way that it is capable of and committed to the implementation of the policies of the government and the delivery of basic goods and services to the people of the country. The Public Service is further called upon to observe the professional ethos and to internalise the concept of serving the people.

It is in this context that one of the underlying themes of the current government is the acceleration of the quality service delivery to the communities. The National Development



Plan (NDP) (2011:365) provides a foundation and the 2030 vision which *inter alia* calls for the building of a capable state which would play a transformative and developmental role; and this requires well run and effectively coordinated state institutions staffed by skilled public servants who are committed to the public and who are capable of delivering consistently high quality services for all South Africans.

In this context, one of the questions therefore is: to what extent can an institution of higher learning such as the University of Pretoria's School of Public Management and Administration (SPMA) position itself, within the constraints of its immediate environment, to play a pioneering role in pursuing the vision of the NDP as a springboard to international competitiveness whilst remaining relevant and trusted locally? How feasible would that journey be without a clearly defined plan for managing change?

In his speech at the launch of the NDP on 11 November 2011, President Zuma praised the National Planning Commission for the extensive consultation in the development of the NDP; and further said that: "... Besides visiting provinces, the Commissioners used the internet and new social mediums to canvass ideas, particularly with younger people. In this way, they were reinforcing our country's traditions. Our country has a rich tradition of using dialogue to build or solve problems. You will recall that when the Freedom Charter was drafted, people from all walks of life made their inputs into what type of South Africa they wanted to live in".

The then Minister in the Presidency, Trevor Manuel had this to say in his speech at the launch of the NDP on 11 November 2011: "...We need strong and mature leadership both in government and from communities to achieve the unity and common purpose required to see the plan through. Leadership is about problem solving. We need initiative. We need voice. We need to test ideas. We can all be leaders in our society. We can all implement the solutions we have collectively identified ... This plan is not a sermon from the mount. It's about identifying how people can be empowered to enable change. We need to reshape expectations we have of government. We have to forge an active citizenry that takes ownership of the solutions to our problems".

One of the questions is: how can universities work together with the government as a basis to enhance their competitiveness and inspire confidence amongst their local communities and constituencies? Can universities and government devise sustainable partnerships in the achievement of the ideals of the NDP? Can universities and government work together to devise a sustainable change plan to deal with a developing trend where students protest violently when they are aggrieved by burning and destroying university property? These are some of the challenges that will confront the universities and government as they embark on this journey of change in the next twenty years. For instance, one of the challenges facing the institutions of higher learning is how to increase their competitiveness in an environment where the resource allocations are dwindling (Sokhela in Ngobeni 2010:264).

GENERAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Service excellence

"Service is the act of helping or doing work for another or for a community" (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1990:406). Whereas "excellence means the state of excelling, surpassing

merit or quality" (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1990:1107). Service delivery excellence may therefore be defined as the act of delivering a service of a superior quality to our citizens. This definition implies that the Public Service has to consistently deliver quality services and that it must continuously find new ways of doing things in order to improve.

In order to ensure service delivery excellence in the Public Service, one can conclude that the Public Service will have to be continuously improving, innovating, learning and changing in an integrated manner. The interrelatedness and the meaning of these terms are now discussed below.

Innovation

In outlining a process of innovative thinking, Robert (1995:5) makes a distinction between innovation and invention as follows: "Innovation is the broader concept of continuous improvement, whereas invention is one form of innovation. Inventions are usually associated with discoveries such as technology, patents, formulas, and so forth. However, there are many forms of innovation that are more mundane but that, over time, can give an organisation an advantage to continuously improve".

The definition of innovation above and the distinction that is made between innovation and invention is supported by Richards (1985:10–11) who states that: "An invention is a discovery, usually a technical one. Provided the inventor can demonstrate that he or she had been first to make the discovery, and provided it is then judged to be 'not obvious to those skilled in the state of the art', the inventor can be granted legal rights over the invention as 'intellectual property' by means of a patent; whereas innovation is a process whereby new ideas are put into practice. Although many of the most significant new ideas put into practice are technological ideas, innovations may also take place when non-technological ideas are put into practice – which means that we can have innovations whose main novelty is social".

From the above definitions one can deduce the relationship and interdependence between innovation and invention, and between innovation and continuous improvement; and a conclusion could be drawn that both invention and continuous improvement are critical to the achievement of innovation. The same can be said about the relationship between innovation, learning and change.

Innovative organisations can be characterised as those that have the capacity to learn and change. In this regard, Robert (1995:30) states that there is a direct linear extrapolation between the amount of change found in an organisation's business environment and the amount of new product (service) opportunities uncovered... and that in fact new product (service) innovation thrives on change. Which in essence is to say that better management of change has a direct impact on the success of organisations.

Theories of learning and change

In this regard, Handy (1995:44–45) argues that to learn is to change and that the theory of learning is at the heart of the theory of changing; and in essence posits that if changing is, as he argues, only another word for learning, then the theories of learning will also be theories of changing. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the proposition put forward by Handy above; the underlying deduction is certainly that, for service excellence and innovation to



take place, the organisation must be able to better manage change and that learning is an integral part of changing.

Transformation as defined in the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service

The term *transformation* is defined in the *White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service* (1995) thus: "The Government regards transformation as a dynamic, focused and relatively short-term process, designed to fundamentally reshape the Public Service for its appointed role in the new dispensation in South Africa". This definition was given in the context of what was an immediate priority at that time namely; "administrative transformation". Hence the White Paper (1995) states that while it (the White Paper) will contribute towards the longer-term reform process, through the elaboration of a broad vision and policy guidelines, "its immediate concern will (be) to facilitate the shorter-term process of administration transformation".

Broadly speaking, *transformation* is a continuous process of fundamental change to achieve broader and long-term goals of the government as set out in various policy documents. In this context, *change* is part and parcel of *transformation*. And transformation can also be regarded as part of change - if that type of change is revolutionary or profound or fundamental in nature. The *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP) (1994) also refers to this type of *revolutionary change* as *fundamental transformation* which is what the RDP sought to achieve.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Griffin et al. (2006:5) describe managing change as follows:

"One meaning of 'managing change' refers to making changes in a planned and managed or systematic fashion. External events may also necessitate organisational change. Hence, the second meaning of managing change - the response to changes over which an organisation exercises little or no control (e.g. a rapid rise in the price of oil, devaluation of the national currency, civil unrest, new legislation, and so on). The recognition of the need for timely adjustment to external events has given rise to the concept of the 'learning organisation', one (that is) capable of continuous adaptation to the changing external environment. Finally, change management refers to an area of professional practice and the related body of knowledge that has grown up within and around this subject, mainly as a result of experience in the private sector. There are many models for change management: business schools offer instruction in its theory and practice and consulting firms offer a variety of services to facilitate change. This body of knowledge focuses on change within a single organisation".

As a discipline change management is relatively new. How change is managed in both the private and the public sector tend to be influenced by the writings of leading authors and practitioners in the field of change management. As the discipline of change management is dynamic, there are sometimes contestations in terms of theories of how best to initiate and to manage change.

Various leading authors and practitioners tend to approach change management in various ways based on their understanding of the theory of change. For example, research done in the *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD) countries concluded that more research and debate are needed to build a methodology for managing change that is able to guide the work of decision makers and policy-makers; and in that sense the research findings opened a new field for research in OECD countries as it introduced some questions for future work programmes (Melchor 2008:8).

As a discipline, change management has two schools of thought namely: the traditional school of thought and the emergent school of thought (Stroh 2005:51). The most prevalent and overriding paradigm in traditional change management is the planned change approach to change management which generally tends to limit the organisation's ability to respond promptly to sudden changes in the environment. The emergent paradigm to change management has the following characteristics, *inter alia* (Stroh 2005:61):

- change is seen as a continuous process of learning and experimentation in order to adapt and align to a turbulent environment;
- the main purpose is developing long-term organisational capabilities;
- participative management style and importance of dialogue is emphasised;
- there is more focus on changing the culture of the organisation;
- change efforts tend to be non-programmatic and emergent; and
- there is less emphasis on financial incentives as a driver of change.

Although the two schools of thought on change management may, in theory, appear to be mutually exclusive; in practice the ideas expressed by the two schools of thought on change management do tend to converge in what could be called *a continuum of change management approaches*.

Given the above, it is the author's general deduction that the conceptual understanding of change management generally tends to revolve around the gap analysis/closing the gap model, where an organisation seeks to move from its current state to the desired state in relation to the changes in the environment (triggers of change). In essence, in terms of the gap analysis model, the triggers of change would necessitate that the organisation takes stock of its current reality in relation to the challenges it faces. This would generally entail the diagnosis of the *status quo* (current reality) by the top leaders of the organisation to determine the nature and extent of the changes required, including the outcomes of the change process, in order to align itself with the environment and to attain its desired state.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION'S (DPSA) FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE (FRAMEWORK)

Guided by the prognosis on managing change of chapter 13 of the NDP (2011:408) that there have been many individual initiatives, but there is a tendency to jump from one quick fix or policy fad to the next, and that these frequent changes have created instability in organisational structures and policy approaches that further strain limited capacity; the DPSA has drafted a guide for managing change to address some of the prognosis highlighted above.



The DPSA guide in essence endeavours to respond to this identified weakness, among others, by suggesting a structured and consistent approach to the management of change in the public service in line with the mandate of the Minister for Public Service and Administration (DPSA Framework 2013:4).

The guide proposes inter alia that:

- an executive authority shall prepare a change management plan when significant transitional and transformational changes are introduced focusing on the minimum dimensions such as strategic focus, organisational capability, people capability and change capability; and that;
- such a plan shall form part of the strategic plan and shall comply with the Change Management Strategy Framework approved by the Minister.

(DPSA Framework 2013:8)

The above proposal is critical in at least five respects: *Firstly,* it places the responsibility and accountability for managing change where it belongs, namely with the executive authority who is the political head and the executive authority of a particular department in the Public Service; *Secondly,* it ensures that the triggers of change, the nature of change and the magnitude of change, whether it is transitional or transformational in nature, are determined beforehand in order to ensure that the proposed interventions are proportionate to the nature of the changes required; *Thirdly,* it ensures that once an analysis has been undertaken and the nature and magnitude of the changes is known, what has to be done is captured in the form of a change management plan as part of the strategic planning process; *Fourthly,* since the strategic planning/management process is the responsibility of the top leadership in the departments, developing a change management plan as part of the strategic plan will ensure that the ownership of such a plan remains the responsibility of the top leadership in a department; and, *Fifthly,* it ensures that the Change Management Strategy Framework guides the development of the change management plan in order to ensure consistency in the Public Service. (DPSA Framework 2013:9)

Locating the responsibility for change management in an organisation is critical for the successful implementation of the change management programmes; since the research done by Keller & Aiken (2008:1–2) indicates that about seventy percent of the change management programmes fail for a variety of reasons – one of which is the lack of ownership by the top leaders in an organisation. In the context of the government of South Africa, Sokhela (2007:222) recommends that human resource development and inculcating a culture of intergovernmental relations is critical to the sustainability of change management interventions. And a system of intergovernmental relations that enhances the capacity of the state to execute its developmental mandate and that is guided by the normative guidelines of intergovernmental relations is also critical to the sustainability of the change agenda (Sokhela 2008:48).

SOME LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES (IBM) TURNAROUND

In his three decades in business and nine years as the Chief Executive Officer of IBM, Gerstner (2002:217), when asked about what he had learned about the IBM experience, remarked that

the work-a-day world of business is not about fads or miracles. There are (three) fundamentals that characterise successful enterprises and successful executives namely, they:

- are focused meaning that lack of focus is the most common cause of corporate mediocrity;
- are superb at execution meaning that they get things done and make things happen;
 and
- abound with personal leadership meaning that great institutions are driven to everincreasing levels of accomplishment by individuals who are passionate about winning.

"If not immutable, these three are at least consistent, through the ups and downs of economic cycles, through changes in the leadership of any particular institution, and through technical revolutions, the likes of which we just experienced with the internet. They apply to enterprises of all size and types: large and small companies, publicly traded and non-profit organisations, universities and, in part, governments".

(Gerstner 2002:218)

In essence these three fundamentals outlined above are pillars of a successful turnaround (a change process) which any type of institution which aspires to sustain itself through the journey of change needs to possess in abundance. The lessons beg the question: will government institutions or universities or any institutions that do not possess these fundamentals be able to sustain themselves on this long journey of change? Can an institution sustain any international competitiveness in the next twenty years without these fundamentals in place? Can any institution deliver on its core mandate without these fundamentals in place?

The author's submission is that without these fundamentals in place, any institution would find the journey of achieving international competitiveness and local trust an insurmountable challenge to overcome. And that undertaking this journey without a clearly defined change plan would make the journey even more insurmountable.

CONCLUSION

This article has sought to contextualise the role of managing change as a critical success factor for humankind in the achievement of service delivery excellence and innovation in the Public Service by focusing on the lessons learned from Mandela and De Klerk. Context to the importance of managing change was given by referring to what the NDP and other reference documents pronounce on the vision for the next twenty years and challenges such as building capability as one of the success factors for the implementation of the NDP. Some of the terms relating to the subject-matter were defined and reference was made to the guide for managing change that the Minister for Public Service has approved as well as the lessons learned from the IBM turnaround and its relevance to managing change as a critical success factor for international competitiveness and local trust.

Back to the *horses* and *zebras*, the F.W. de Klerk Foundation and the Nelson Mandela Foundation embraced this conference by making a specific direct input to this paper's topic on: "Managing change as a critical success factor for humankind — Lessons from Mandela and De Klerk"; and in concluding the author quotes their input *verbatim* below.



The F.W. de Klerk Foundation (07 October 2014) made the following input: "Decide about everything you must do to solve your problems and to seize your opportunities - persuade your constituency to support your action - act quickly and decisively when the balance of forces are most propitious - and have the courage and resilience to overcome whatever problems you may encounter."

The Nelson Mandela Foundation (10 October 2014) made the following input: "Change is inevitable - its bridges gaps, makes way for the necessary and new, and can allow us to graduate to the next level whilst remaining at all times relevant and above all real. Madiba aptly said: 'The foundation has been laid - the building is in progress. With a new generation of leaders and a people that rolls up its sleeves in partnerships for change, we can and shall build the country of our dreams!' This is about a journey that is our collective responsibility as active citizens and it cannot be achieved without valued, like-minded partners. So the journey continues and it is underpinned by our shared values of leadership, community, equality, quality, integrity and innovation. Catalysts of socio-economic transformation, if you will, and they define how we prosper professionally and in our individual lives.

But the proof is in the pudding – we cannot just pay lip-service - we need to deliver and more importantly affect change. This is through the continued pursuit of excellence, the ability and willingness to learn and then mentor through the transfer of skills and knowledge. Madiba has followed three rules through-out his life 1. Free yourself, 2. Free others, and 3. Serve every day. Food for thought indeed and not a bad mantra to own daily.

If we are to build an empowered, fair, inclusive and productive citizenry and establish one national identity, social justice through which fairness and equity in terms of access to and participation in socio-economic aspects of society, is an absolute necessity. In many ways, we face a very different world today than that of our parents. We are not limited as to where we must live, where we may go, what work we may do, who our partner should be, what direction we may follow. This is an opportunity and a blessing to be grabbed with both hands.

But while change is inevitable, it must be steered and focused to achieve a positive outcome.

Indeed, yinde lendlela esiyihambayo, washo uMandela kubalandeli bakhe, wathi siyohlangana nge Freedom Day [It is a long road still ahead. Mandela told his followers that we will meet on Freedom Day].

Recommendations

The legacy of Mandela and De Klerk belongs to the collective South African legacy which gave birth to the current constitutional democracy. This article, therefore, recommends that it is incumbent upon all scholars and practitioners operating in the public affairs sphere to:

- continue this journey of change through scholarly research and publications on the lessons from Mandela and De Klerk;
- reflect on the current challenges facing the legislature, executive, judiciary, higher education and the South African society at large through the paradigm of Mandela and De Klerk; and
- use this paradigm as a springboard to inform conflict resolution interventions in the African continent and the rest of the world.

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