

## THINKPIECE - PRESENTATION OF IDEAS, OPINIONS, DISCUSSION & FACTS

### Leadership transition challenges at Mkombozi

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I am a “social entrepreneur” and a “pioneer leader” of the Mkombozi Centre for Street Children. Many would say that I am a “charismatic leader for social change” (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p. 180). In fact, I am currently preparing to move away from the organisation, and as such, Mkombozi now faces a leadership transition. At the same time, Mkombozi is moving from a pioneer phase of development to a more integrated phase - this integrated phase is characterised by an environment wherein people are empowered to innovate within policy guidelines, participatory processes and self-managed teams and where a common purpose and identity acts as a unifying force. Mkombozi is consciously and earnestly attempting to manage this leadership transition and organisational change. Certain theories of leadership and power have relevance and importance in determining how we prepare for the changes taking place. They highlight the importance of strengthening the positive interdependence within teams at Mkombozi and in determining the attitudes, skills and behaviours of the new leaders that we recruit so that strong foundations are laid in advance of my departure.

It has been said that: “To lead is to guide by influencing the destination and the direction for the group to go” (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 167). I believe that I am a “typical pioneer leader” in that my interpersonal patterns show that I am both “high dominance” (authority and control) and “high sociability” (intimacy and friendliness) (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 181). Although I had assumed that I was a “task-oriented leader”, the Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) scale developed by Fielder revealed that I am a highly “relationship-oriented leader”. This means that my ability to draw on task and relationship as the situation demands makes me a hard leader to follow, and that Mkombozi’s staff is very loyal to me. In turn, (I say with respect and humility that) a new leader has “big shoes to fill” and Mkombozi must be clear about the leadership style and power base a new leader will bring to the table.

Clearly, Mkombozi does not need a manager who will handle the status quo (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 168), but someone who will advance the growth of the organisation (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 199). A new leader must work towards achievement of group goals, while maintaining effective relationships amongst group members (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 168). Importantly, in a civil society organisation, group productivity lies in living the organisation’s mission and values. Thus, we need a leader who is open about their love of the work and its processes, of the people that we interact with, and of life itself. We need a leader who strives, innovates and creates, not one who manages, maintains and continues.

Mkombozi needs to cultivate “situational leadership” whereby “leadership is provided by group members varying their behaviour to provide the actions a group needs at a specific time” (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 190). To this end, skills must be strengthened in “goal leadership actions” and “relationship leadership actions” (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 190, 191). At Mkombozi, such skills are valued because of their importance in working with children and grassroots communities in a facilitative rather than a didactic fashion - and yet, as an organisation, we have not yet linked these skills to overall group effectiveness. If we are to achieve true situational leadership, then we must explicitly practice these skills in our team situations in order to build group productivity, cohesiveness and member satisfaction.

Notably, in Tanzania, autocratic power tends to be the norm and the popular view is that power is inextricably the result of position. In practice, the form that power manifests in a group is often determined by the nature of the social interdependence existing among the individuals in that group. This means that effective leadership transition management at Mkombozi must strengthen and facilitate opportunities for “distributed action leadership” and positive social interdependence within our teams. We must recruit a Director who will only use that positional power to achieve constructive outcomes (i.e. to enhance group effectiveness, to work for the benefits of others and with the agreement of group members) (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 224). In this way we work towards a more dynamic and interdependent power which exists in relationships, not in individuals. Mkombozi’s challenge is to determine how resilient it can make its teams so that it ensures power is only wielded for the benefit of the group rather than the individual.

In my experience, Mkombozi requires a leader with informational and expert power, as well as sophisticated skill to diagnose whether a situation demands “delegation, participation, selling or telling” as a leadership response. Mkombozi also requires a leader who does not influence through coercion or domination - but consistently works towards persuading members to cooperate in setting and achieving goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 185).

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**Reference:** Johnson & Johnson (2006). *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*. Pearson International Ed.