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Leadership Styles Observed In Whale Rider

Dannette Allen Bronaugh

George Mason University

Watching a movie and reflecting on the leadership style was an interesting assignment to complete after reading the five books, three articles and writing three papers on different leadership styles. Having a daughter who enjoys watching movies, hanging out with her parents, and desires to be a marine biologist made Whale Rider (2003) the movie I chose to watch. Whale Rider is a film that takes place in a small New Zealand coastal village. The story is based on the Maori claim that they are descendants from Paikea, the Whale Rider. The movie opens with a young lady giving birth to twins. As the opening scene plays out the young mother dies along with the male baby boy. A baby girl and father survive the mother and son. During childbirth the audience hears the mother name her young daughter, Paikea, who is called Pai for short. The young father, Porourangi, is visibly grieved by the deaths and viewers see him lying in bed with his deceased wife as their two children lie side by side in bassinets in the room. Viewers discover quickly that Porourangi is the Chief's eldest son and that for more than a 1000 years a male heir born to the Chief succeeds to the title. When the Chief, Koro, arrives at the hospital, he refuses to acknowledge his granddaughter. He tells his son that he cannot name her Pai, and that he can come home to start over. The young twin boy was thought to be the Chief's heir and the grandfather refuses to acknowledge that Pai could be the inheritor of the tradition. Koro goes as far to state that Pai is of no use to him.

Eventually the viewer sees that Koro learns to love Pai. It isn't until later in the movie that the viewer learns that Porourangi has left the village to pursue his interests as an international artist and left Pai to be raised by her grandparents. As the movie progresses one realizes that Pai's father has left because of his inability to

live up to his father's expectations that he was to lead their people. Porourangi does come back for visits from time to time, and he even tries to take Pai with him to live in Germany, however as she begins to leave, she hears the sound of the whale and realizes she cannot leave. Pai tells her father that she cannot go because Koro needs her. It is here in the movie that one sees Pai's realization that she is to be the next leader of the Maori tribe.

After reflecting on the movie and watching it a few times one sees that there are three characters in the movie that demonstrate leadership skills each in a different manner. The first is Koro, the Chief. He wants to continue to lead his people in the Maori ways. The second leader is Pai. The movie script does not give the third leader, Pai's grandmother, as much screen time as the other two, however.

The grandmother's leadership is not as developed as much as the two primary leaders, but she is a leader nonetheless. As one reflects on Flower's character one can see that she is a quiet, nonvisibale leader who is a leader without having been officially given the title of a leader. She understands that change is needed and that it will need to be embraced by all members of the village. She fosters relationships with all parties, trying to get them to work together for the good of all. She is mindful in all she does which is a leadership quality that she needs as the Chief's wife. She is looked up to and respected by the other women in the community. She has a respectful mind and recognizes diversity in all humans and goes beyond just tolerating it, she embraces it and wants others to succeed. She is willing to stand up for what she believes even if it causes friction. Flower does not let the fact that she is marginalized stand in the way of her leading. At one point she

goes against Koro's wishes to start the opening ceremonies of the school because Pai has not arrived. Flower has many of the attributes Fullen (2001) discusses in his model. She has enthusiasm, hope and energy. She is willing to understand change and embraces change, she builds relationships, she leads with a moral purpose, and she is willing to share knowledge. When she recognizes that Pai has the qualities of the next leader, she encourages her to seek out her uncle to train her in the use of the Maori fighting stick.

The first primary leader introduced in the movie is Koro. He is the Chief of the Maori, the husband of Flower and the grandfather of Pai. Koro is a visible leader. During a children's performance early on, it is he who gets the crowd under control by banging his cane. Life is moving along for the Maori and it is not until Porourangi, Pai's father comes for a visit that the viewer is able to learn more about the Maori tradition. A scene unfolds between Koro and Porourangi in the Maori hall just after Pai has preformed. In this hall there are statues and Koro tells Porourangi to take his time connecting with his past ancestors. A few days later, an argument erupts between Koro and Porourangi as he shows his artwork to his family and an invited Maori lady, pictures of his girlfriend are displayed. When Koro learns that this lady is pregnant with Porourangi's child, he wants to know why the lady was not brought back to the village with Porourangi. Porourangi goes on to tell his father that she wants to be near her family and that Koro has already ruined one of his children and he would not have the opportunity to do the same with another. When Pai leaves with Porourangi and it is realized that Porourangi has no interest in being the Chief, Koro calls the men together to talk about looking for a new Chief.

Koro's leadership style is more along the lines of the Prince's style. He is very authoritarian. At one point in the movie he even comments that Pai is of no use to him and he blames the tribes misfortunes on her. He also only desires relationships on his terms. Koro also is very cautious about showing compassion to anyone. This includes not only his family but also the young men who he spends time training. Machiavelli talks about being loved and feared and how it is ideal for a Prince to possess both qualities, but if he has to choose, being feared is preferable. Koro is feared more than he appears to be loved by others. When he trains the boys, he is constantly on them, pushing them very hard. Their fear of him is seen in their eyes. At one point, one of the young men in training is pushed so hard, he takes his stick and hits Koro with it, for which he is praised. This young man is demonstrating a leadership quality that Koro seems to admire. There is also an act of fear displayed within Koro's own family. His eldest son has moved many thousands of miles away, and he does not want to tell his father about the many details going on in his life. It appears that it is easier for Porourangi to live farther away from his father than to live under his leadership. There does appear to be an order within the village and it does not appear that Koro is hated. According to Machiavelli, a Prince should choose his friends wisely. In the movie it is interesting to realize that Koro does not appear to have any friends, and the viewer does not see if Koro stays away from his subjects property, but one would think that he does.

The second primary leader is Pai, who leads in her own way. Reflecting on her leadership style, it is easy to see how she embraces many of the styles depicted in the readings this semester. Applegate, J. Early, P., and Tarule J. (unpublished

manuscript) state, she is marginalized due to the fact that she is a woman. It is apparent throughout the movie that Pai does not appear to have any proximate or nonproximate friendships that she can turn to during this difficult time. Pai did not let gender imbalances push her to become invisible. She was also transparent with people whom she felt were safe like her father and grandmother.

Pai demonstrates Fullen's (2001) outline of leadership. She is enthusiastic, has energy and she is very hopeful that change can come along. She even states during the movie saying that new leaders do exist. Pai appears to embrace and understand the need for change. She hangs around the training center learning the chants of her ancestors and she practices them till she knows them. She learns how to use the stick to fight through the help of her uncle. In a speech she prepares in honor of her grandfather she states that the first-born son in every generation has become the leader of the tribe until now. She realizes that she is to be the leader of the tribe, because she has mastered all the skills her grandfather was teaching the boys, and she was the only one to be able to complete the last skill of retrieving the whale tooth necklace from the bottom of the ocean. Pai is very good at building relationships with all the characters in the movie. She works on building her relationship with her grandfather, and with her grandmother's friends. She even tells these ladies at one point that Maori women needed to stop smoking in order to protect their childbearing properties. Pai also works hard in the movie to build relationships with the young boys in training. Pai acts with a moral purpose. She acts with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of her tribe. One of the big aspects of Fullen's model is that of coherence making which requires the

leader to understand that change requires a new mindset and Pai demonstrates this extraordinarily well in the movie.

Pai also embodies many of the five minds that Gardner (2008) outlines in his book. She has a disciplined mind in her habits of working until she masters a skill. Pai is able to synthesize information she learns. She is able to take the important information and know what she needs to pay attention to. Pai has a creative mind, in that she is able to ask new questions and try new things, she is able to push against the bubble. As the movie closes one sees that Pai is embracing the ethical mind in that she will have to understand her new responsibilities.

Pai embraces the principals of Bordas (2007), in that she knows her history. She is like the Sankofa, the mythical bird of Africa. Pai stands with her feet facing forward at the changes that can come with new leadership. Her head looking backward always reflecting on where she came from and the ancient rituals of her people. When she presents her speech that she dedicates to her grandfather, Koro, she is looking back on her family lineage of chiefs. Pai also appears to embrace the multicultural principal of *gracias* (Bordas, 2007). She exhibits gratitude, hope and forgiveness. She is hopeful for her people and what new leadership can bring. At the end of the movie one sees hope and forgiveness portrayed.

Whale Rider was a fantastic movie to watch and analyze for leadership styles. Watching a movie with a more analytical eye can be fun and enlightening. Many times movies are just ways to check out of reality but watching them with a critical eye can provide opportunities for learning in a new and fresh way.

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