



GANDHELA: A Humanistic Deliberation Architecture for Transformative Leadership from moral inspiration to auditable decision practice

Ignacio Bonasa Alzuria

Real Academia Europea de Doctores (RAED), Madrid, Spain

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.68050/JAMS.2026.552>

Received: 20 Sept 2026; Accepted: 21 Sept 2026; Published: 22 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Leadership scholarship has developed rich accounts of ethical conduct, responsibility, service, authenticity, adaptation, paradox, and stakeholder relationships. Yet a practical problem remains: when a transformative decision is costly, contested, time-bounded, and taken under asymmetric power, humanistic language does not by itself ensure that leaders will examine avoidable harm, missing voices, post-decision relationships, or dependence on the leader. This conceptual article introduces GANDHELA as a provisional deliberation architecture designed for that problem. It is not presented as a validated psychological theory, a personality inventory, or a set of eight independent leadership traits. Its genealogy is deliberately adversarial. Gandhi contributes the question of means and their institutional residue; Ambedkar challenges benevolent representation by forcing attention to voice and power; Mandela sharpens the question of what must remain possible the day after a decisive act. These tensions are translated into three movements—govern oneself, encounter the human reality of the decision, and leave institutional capacity—and eight auditable lenses: self-governance, harm containment, purpose, dignity, situated humanity, encounter, institutional legacy, and verifiable action. A transversal power test asks who defines the problem, alternatives, costs, evidence, and right to challenge the process. The article positions GANDHELA against established leadership approaches, specifies a stopping rule for acute emergencies, develops propositions and observable decision traces, and outlines a comparative pilot design. Its claim is deliberately modest and falsifiable: in transformative decisions involving unavoidable human cost, a structured sequence that records harm, voice, power, post-decision relations, reversibility, and institutional dependency may expose consequential omissions that ordinary deliberation leaves implicit. If credible comparators reveal the same omissions with equal discipline, GANDHELA's incremental claim should be reduced rather than defended.

Keywords: humanistic leadership; ethical decision-making; responsible leadership; dignity; power; deliberation; institutional legacy; Gandhi; Mandela; organizational transformation.

INTRODUCTION: THE DECISION AFTER THE SPEECH

Transformation is easy to celebrate in the abstract. It becomes harder when a real decision has a deadline, a budget, a legal constraint, a person who will lose, and a leader who possesses enough authority to impose a solution. At that point, the vocabulary of humanistic leadership faces its most demanding test. A leader may sincerely value dignity and still communicate a restructuring in a humiliating way. An institution may speak of purpose while transferring most of the cost of that purpose to people with little power to object. A team may hold a consultation while retaining complete control over the questions, the interpretation of the answers, and the final decision. The ethical problem is therefore not simply whether leaders possess admirable values. It is whether the decision process forces them to look at what pressure encourages them to omit.

GANDHELA begins from two questions. The first is: how can a reality be transformed without reproducing, in the process, the logic that the transformation claims to overcome? The second is: if the transformation succeeds, what will remain when the leader is no longer present? These questions connect the ethics of means with the architecture of institutional continuity. They also shift attention from the heroic leader to the decision



itself: what information entered it, what damage was distinguished, whose voice mattered, what relationship had to remain possible, what dependencies were created, and what evidence could later require correction.

The proposal is intentionally narrower than a general theory of leadership. GANDHELA does not claim that Gandhi and Mandela constitute a representative sample of effective leaders, nor that their biographies can validate a contemporary management model. Their lives are used as archives of tensions. Gandhi intensifies the question of means and the institutional residue of action. Mandela intensifies the question of what happens after victory, when adversaries, institutions, and damaged relationships do not vanish. Ambedkar enters the architecture as a critical counterweight to any romantic account of moral representation. His challenge makes a crucial distinction visible: empathy, sincerity, and sacrifice do not automatically confer legitimate authority to define another group's interests.

The research gap addressed here is therefore procedural, not moral. The literature offers sophisticated accounts of what responsible, ethical, authentic, servant, adaptive, and paradox-aware leadership should attend to; what is less explicit is a compact decision sequence that obliges a team to leave an auditable record of avoidable harm, excluded or weakly represented voices, power asymmetries, the relationship required after the decision, institutional dependency, and conditions for revision. GANDHELA is proposed as one candidate architecture for that narrower task. The central research question is not whether GANDHELA sounds humanistic, but whether using it changes what decision-makers notice, document, mitigate, or reconsider when compared with a credible alternative procedure.

WHY ANOTHER LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK?

Leadership scholarship already contains mature traditions concerned with ethics, responsibility, service, authenticity, adaptation, stakeholder relationships, paradox, and dignity. Ethical leadership examines normatively appropriate conduct and the social learning through which leaders communicate standards (Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006). Responsible leadership places stakeholder relationships and social responsibility at the center of leadership practice (Maak & Pless, 2006; Pless & Maak, 2012). Servant leadership reverses the conventional hierarchy by foregrounding service and follower development (Greenleaf, 1970; Eva et al., 2019). Authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011). Adaptive leadership focuses attention on difficult problems that cannot be solved by technical expertise alone (Heifetz, 1994). Paradox scholarship shows why leaders must often sustain competing demands rather than prematurely eliminate one side (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Smith, 2014).

This crowded intellectual territory creates a demanding burden of proof. A memorable acronym is not, by itself, a scholarly contribution, and construct proliferation can make leadership research less rather than more intelligible. Meta-analytic work has already shown substantial overlap among prominent positive leadership constructs (Banks et al., 2016; Banks et al., 2018). GANDHELA therefore begins with an adversarial question directed at itself: what, if anything, does this sequence require a decision-maker to record that a competent application of existing approaches would not already reveal? If the answer is 'nothing', the model should contract, merge with existing practice, or disappear.

The proposed distinction is procedural rather than ontological. GANDHELA does not assert eight natural properties of leadership. It arranges a sequence around a particular class of problems: transformative decisions that contain unavoidable human cost, asymmetric power, consequential relationships, and a risk of dependence on the leader. The value, if any, lies in disciplined traversal. A framework may contain the word "dignity," for example, without forcing a decision team to identify who is being treated merely as a category. It may value stakeholders without requiring the team to record which affected group lacks meaningful power to contest the problem definition. It may value sustainability without asking what collapses if the founder disappears tomorrow. GANDHELA's empirical claim must therefore concern omissions and traces, not moral superiority.



INTELLECTUAL GENEALOGY: LEARNING WITHOUT BUILDING STATUES

Gandhi: Means Leave Residues

A superficial managerial reading of Gandhi converts nonviolence into a generic virtue. A more useful reading treats the relation between means and ends as generative. The instrument used to obtain an outcome changes the actors, expectations, relationships, and permissions that survive the outcome. Mantena (2012) interprets Gandhian nonviolence as a form of political realism attentive to conflict and the dynamics of action rather than as moral decoration. Hazama (2023) further complicates any timeless or essentialized account of ahimsa by reconstructing its historical development. For organizational purposes, the implication is not that firms should imitate an anticolonial movement. The transferable question is narrower: what does the chosen method produce in addition to the formal result?

A restructuring conducted through secrecy may achieve its financial target and simultaneously teach remaining employees that information is dangerous and loyalty is unilateral. A sanction may protect a legitimate rule while being staged to humiliate. A negotiation may obtain concessions while converting future conversations into defensive games. The method therefore has its own outcome vector. Traditional dashboards can capture the formal target while missing the institutional residue.

GANDHELA operationalizes this intuition as harm containment rather than as an absolute prohibition of coercion. Organizations legitimately close units, terminate contracts, sanction misconduct, and allocate scarce resources. The relevant distinction is between unavoidable harm and harm added by design, haste, contempt, opacity, convenience, or symbolic displays of power. This distinction is imperfect, but it can be documented and challenged.

Ambedkar: Consultation Is Not the Same as Voice

The 1932 conflict surrounding political representation of the then-termed Depressed Classes and the Poona Pact makes the limits of benevolent representation impossible to ignore. Ambedkar defended mechanisms capable of giving marginalized groups greater political autonomy; Gandhi opposed separate electorates and undertook a fast. The episode remains historically and normatively contested, and it should not be reduced to a morality play in which one figure simply defeats the other. Its analytical value lies in the collision between the moral quality of representation and the institutional structure of representation (Ambedkar, 1945; Biswas, 2024).

For contemporary leadership, the correction is sharp: a leader can be empathic, coherent, austere, and sincere while still occupying too much interpretive space. Consultation is not equivalent to voice when the consulting party retains the monopoly over framing the question, interpreting the response, and deciding what counts. The virtue of the decision-maker and the architecture of participation are separate goods. Neither guarantees the other.

This is why GANDHELA contains a transversal power test rather than treating power as one more letter. The test asks: Who defined the problem? Who defined the feasible alternatives? Who can veto? Who can leave? Who bears costs without equivalent decision rights? Who can contest the process without retaliation? A humanistic procedure that cannot answer those questions risks becoming paternalism with better language.

Mandela: The Day After Is Part of the Decision

Mandela is often compressed into an icon of reconciliation. That compression removes precisely the tensions that make his trajectory analytically useful. The struggle against apartheid included protest, repression, clandestine organization, armed struggle, imprisonment, negotiation, democratic institution-building, and a contested process of truth and reconciliation. Umkhonto we Sizwe emerged in 1961 in a context in which parts of the anti-apartheid movement concluded that previous strategies had reached a limit. The history therefore cannot be folded into the same moral template as Gandhi.



The transferable question is what happens after a decisive act. The adversary of yesterday may remain a citizen, colleague, shareholder, union representative, supplier, customer, or institutional counterpart tomorrow. The formal decision does not end the system in which the parties continue to live. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission further demonstrates that truth, amnesty, reconciliation, justice, and reparation are related but non-identical categories (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, 1998–2003). Mamdani’s critique (2007) is especially useful because it prevents “reconciliation” from becoming a word that closes the file while material or structural harm remains.

In organizational life, the scale is obviously incomparable, but the structural question recurs. After a merger, a strike, a dismissal, a governance dispute, or the removal of a founder, some relationship remains. It may be cooperation, coexistence under rules, reparation, professional respect, or dignified separation. Encounter does not mean embrace. It means that the required post-decision relationship is designed rather than discovered accidentally after the damage has been done.

FROM BIOGRAPHY TO PROTOCOL: FOUR EXTRACTION RULES

Contextuality. A historical practice enters the model only after it has been translated into a question that does not pretend the original context is equivalent to an organization. Satyagraha is not an HR technique; the effects of means can nevertheless be examined in an HR decision.

Adversarial attachment. Every transferable intuition must travel with its uncomfortable counterevidence. Gandhi travels with Ambedkar and the possibility of moral coercion; reconciliation travels with incomplete reparation; charismatic leadership travels with dependence and succession risk.

Lens	Core question	Required trace	Failure signal
G — Self-governance	What part of this decision comes from the problem, and what part from ego, fear, identity, sunk cost, or need for control?	Declared interests, fears, incentives, assumptions	Decision-maker’s position is treated as neutral by default
A — Harm containment	What harm is unavoidable, and what harm are we adding through design, haste, opacity, contempt, or convenience?	Harm map, reversibility, mitigations, cost bearer	All harm is labeled ‘necessary’
N — Purpose	What legitimate good is being pursued, for whom, over what horizon, and what limit cannot be crossed in its name?	Purpose statement, beneficiaries, red lines	Purpose becomes a blank cheque
D — Dignity	Who is being treated merely as a number, obstacle, category, or instrument?	Non-negotiable treatment constraints	Efficiency erases personhood
H — Situated humanity	What lived experience is missing from the data and who is absent from the room?	Missing perspectives, direct evidence, dissent	Averages substitute for affected people
E — Encounter	What relationship must remain possible after the decision?	Post-decision relationship requirement; repair needs	Reconciliation is demanded without justice
L — Institutional legacy	What knowledge, authority, relationships, and capacity will remain when the leader is absent?	Dependency map, transfer mechanism, absence test	Leader indispensability is praised
A — Verifiable action	What evidence would show success, harm, or the need to correct or reverse?	Indicators, review date,	Intent substitutes for results



		owner, reversal criteria	
--	--	-----------------------------	--

Observable translation. An intuition belongs in the protocol only if answering it can leave a trace: an alternative, a recorded harm, an absent voice, a dependency, a dissent, a mitigation, or a review criterion. Inspiration without trace remains philosophy, not procedure.

Explanatory rivalry. Before claiming novelty, each question must be compared with frameworks already occupying the territory. If responsible, ethical, adaptive, servant, or paradox-oriented leadership forces the same examination with equal discipline, GANDHELA should not claim the difference.

These rules are designed to prevent three inferential errors. The first is survivorship bias: famous historical figures are not a sample from which causal leadership effectiveness can be inferred. The second is retrospective hagiography: selecting only episodes that fit the desired model. The third is confusing genealogy with validation. Gandhi and Mandela can explain where questions came from; they cannot demonstrate that those questions improve a contemporary decision. Validation begins only when the protocol is compared with alternatives under observable conditions.

THE GANDHELA ARCHITECTURE

GANDHELA is organized into three movements: govern oneself, encounter the human reality of the decision, and leave institutional capacity behind. Across those movements, eight lenses structure deliberation. The acronym is a mnemonic convenience; the lenses may later be merged, reordered, renamed, or removed if evidence shows redundancy. A transversal power test operates across all eight lenses.

Movement One: Govern Oneself

Self-governance is not introspection for its own sake. It recognizes that consequential decisions are filtered through identity, incentives, status, fear, and sunk costs. The more a leader has invested reputation in a strategy, the more difficult it may be to distinguish commitment to purpose from commitment to the self-image attached to that strategy. The protocol therefore asks the decision-maker to state interests and assumptions before evaluating alternatives. This does not eliminate bias; it makes selected biases contestable.

Harm containment follows immediately because self-awareness without consequences can become therapeutic rather than ethical. The decision team separates primary from secondary harm, reversible from irreversible harm, and unavoidable from avoidable harm. It also identifies who bears each cost and who finances mitigation. Purpose then constrains rather than excuses the process. A legitimate objective must specify the boundary beyond which the objective no longer authorizes the chosen means.

Movement Two: Encounter

Dignity and situated humanity move the decision from abstraction toward persons. Dignity asks whether someone is being reduced to a function, number, obstacle, or category. Situated humanity asks what experience is missing from the data. A spreadsheet can accurately describe an average while concealing a subgroup for whom the same decision has a radically different consequence. The aim is not to replace analysis with anecdote, but to prevent aggregate information from being mistaken for complete information.

Encounter then asks what must remain possible after the decision. Importantly, the answer may be separation. A humanistic model becomes dangerous if it turns reconciliation into a moral obligation imposed on the injured party. Dialogue cannot substitute for justice, restitution, safety, or legitimate boundaries. Encounter is therefore conditional: it specifies the relationship needed for implementation or institutional health without romanticizing harmony.

Movement Three: Leave Capacity

Institutional legacy rejects a familiar compliment: “without this leader, nothing works.” That sentence may



describe charisma, commitment, or competence; it may also describe organizational fragility. A leader who monopolizes relationships, tacit knowledge, authority, and conflict resolution can appear exceptionally valuable while creating a system unable to function in their absence. Founder succession research makes clear that continuity depends on organizational conditions, not merely on the virtue of a departing leader (Haveman & Khaire, 2004; Lee et al., 2020).

Verifiable action closes the sequence by forcing the model to expose itself to evidence. Every significant decision should specify expected results, relevant harms to monitor, early warning signals, a review date, a responsible owner, and evidence that would trigger correction or reversal. Humanism should not provide immunity from falsification. If the intervention fails to reduce the harm it claimed to address, moral sincerity is not an adequate result.

THE POWER TEST: THE QUESTION WITHOUT A LETTER

Power is not confined to one stage because it shapes the entire decision environment. The ability to define a problem is itself power. So is the ability to decide which alternatives are “realistic,” who receives information, whose time is urgent, whose evidence is credible, and who can absorb delay. A procedure can be courteous and still be structurally closed.

The transversal test asks six practical questions: who defined the problem; who defined the alternatives; who can veto; who can exit; who bears the cost; and who can challenge the process. The answers should be recorded, not merely discussed. Recording matters because retrospective narratives tend to make the chosen option appear more inevitable than it was. A written trace preserves the existence of discarded alternatives and dissent.

This feature is also an internal critique of GANDHELA itself. The creator of a model accumulates incentives to protect it as time, reputation, and identity become invested in the idea. A framework designed to question power must therefore question the author’s power over the framework. The name, sequence, and number of lenses are not sacred. The model should be allowed to become smaller if evidence warrants it.

POSITIONING GANDHELA AGAINST ESTABLISHED APPROACHES

Approach	Primary emphasis	Overlap with GANDHELA	Proposed procedural distinction
Ethical leadership	Normatively appropriate conduct; modeling and reinforcement	Moral standards, consequences, fairness	Explicit avoidable-harm record, post-decision relationship, dependency and reversal trace
Responsible leadership	Stakeholder relationships and social responsibility	Stakeholder inclusion, relational responsibility	Power test plus auditable distinction between consultation and decision rights
Servant leadership	Service, follower growth, stewardship	Human concern, stewardship, community	Does not require the leader to be benevolent; tests whether benevolence masks asymmetry
Authentic leadership	Self-awareness, transparency, internal moral perspective	Self-governance and reflection	Moves from leader attributes to decision traces and institutional absence
Adaptive leadership	Mobilizing people around adaptive challenges	Difficult trade-offs, learning, distributed work	Adds explicit harm, dignity, post-decision relation, and legacy checks
Paradox	Sustaining competing demands	Firmeza/encounter	Operational sequence for a specific class of



perspective	over time	tension, dynamic balancing	costly transformative decisions
-------------	-----------	-------------------------------	---------------------------------

The comparison below is not a hierarchy and should not be read as a superiority claim. Ethical, responsible, servant, authentic, adaptive, or paradox-oriented leadership may already generate many—or all—of the traces GANDHELA requests. That is not a threat to the inquiry; it is the inquiry. The model earns an incremental contribution only if disciplined use of its sequence changes what teams notice, record, mitigate, or revisit relative to a credible comparator. Otherwise, its useful elements should be absorbed into better-established approaches rather than protected by branding.

STRESS TEST: A PLANT CLOSURE

Consider a manufacturing company facing the possible closure of a plant employing three hundred people. Financial analysis indicates that maintaining the site threatens the viability of the wider group. A conventional decision may therefore appear straightforward: close the plant to protect the whole. A superficially humanistic version may add a compassionate communication plan. GANDHELA does not assume the closure is wrong. It changes the examination.

Self-governance asks whether leaders have become attached to a preferred restructuring narrative or are avoiding alternatives that threaten their status. Harm containment separates the employment loss that may be unavoidable from damage added by timing, secrecy, abruptness, humiliating communication, or inadequate transition support. Purpose asks whether the objective is survival, margin protection, strategic repositioning, or another goal, and which costs that purpose cannot justify.

Dignity asks how people will be informed and whether they are treated as persons rather than headcount. Situated humanity identifies groups hidden by the average: households with two employees at the plant, workers near retirement, employees with limited local mobility, suppliers whose revenue is concentrated in the site, and a community dependent on the activity. Encounter asks what relationship the organization needs with those who leave: perhaps no continuing employment relationship, but still legal fairness, reputational trust, alumni relations, supplier transitions, or community responsibility.

Legacy asks whether the restructuring creates new dependencies on a small executive group or whether knowledge is transferred before departure. Verifiable action records the assumptions that made closure appear necessary, the alternatives rejected, mitigation commitments, expected financial effects, social harms to monitor, and the date at which the decision's premises will be reviewed. The power test records who was allowed to challenge the initial framing and whether affected groups possessed any real capacity to alter execution.

The protocol does not transform a bad outcome into a good one. It does not guarantee justice. Its more modest function is to make selected costs harder to disappear from the table and to preserve a trace that allows later scrutiny of the claim that "there was no alternative."

WHEN GANDHELA SHOULD BE SILENT

A model becomes unserious when it attempts to occupy every decision. The ditching of US Airways Flight 1549 in the Hudson River illustrates the opposite boundary. After bird strikes caused the loss of thrust in both engines, the crew faced severe time constraints. The National Transportation Safety Board (2010) documented the compressed decision environment and the importance of crew coordination. In such an emergency, asking a pilot to work through eight deliberative lenses would be absurd and potentially dangerous.

The stopping rule is therefore explicit: when an immediate threat and a minimal time window leave no legitimate opportunity for deliberation to alter the option or its execution, technical competence, training, procedure, and relevant expertise take priority. GANDHELA may return afterward for review, learning,



accountability, and redesign. The maturity of a framework is partly demonstrated by knowing when to withdraw.

This boundary also prevents the language of inclusion from degrading high-reliability performance. High-reliability organizations depend on sensitivity to operations, expertise, and disciplined response to failure (Sutcliffe, 2011). Deliberation is not automatically virtuous when seconds matter. The relevant humanistic obligation may be to design the training, authority, and post-event learning system before the emergency occurs.

PROPOSITIONS FOR EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION

P1 — Omission detection. Compared with an unstructured executive discussion, use of GANDHELA will increase the number and specificity of documented avoidable harms in transformative decisions with material human cost.

P2 — Power visibility. Compared with a values-only reflection, use of the transversal power test will increase explicit identification of asymmetries in problem definition, alternative selection, veto rights, and cost bearing.

P3 — Post-decision design. Use of the Encounter lens will increase the explicit specification of required post-decision relationships and repair conditions, without necessarily increasing reconciliation-oriented choices.

P4 — Institutional dependency. Use of the Legacy lens will increase identification of person-dependent knowledge, relationships, authority, and legitimacy, and will generate more concrete transfer mechanisms.

P5 — Reversibility. Use of Verifiable Action will increase the frequency with which teams pre-specify evidence capable of triggering revision or reversal.

P6 — Incremental validity. If a credible comparator from ethical or responsible leadership produces equivalent traces with comparable specificity and consistency, GANDHELA will show limited incremental procedural value.

P7 — Boundary condition. Under severe time compression, the full protocol will reduce decision efficiency without sufficient compensating informational gain; therefore the stopping rule is necessary rather than optional.

A COMPARATIVE PILOT DESIGN

The first empirical test should be intentionally modest. Rather than surveying leaders about whether they “have” GANDHELA, the unit of analysis should be the decision. A matched or randomized simulation can present teams with the same complex organizational case. One condition uses GANDHELA; another uses a credible comparator such as a structured ethical decision process; a third, if resources permit, uses ordinary executive deliberation with equal time.

Before the exercise, evaluation criteria should be preregistered. Outcomes should include the number and quality of alternatives considered; avoidable harms identified; affected groups represented; power asymmetries made explicit; post-decision relationship requirements; institutional dependencies; dissent preserved; mitigation commitments; and criteria capable of changing the decision. Independent coders blind to condition can score written decision records. Inter-rater reliability should be reported.

The primary question is not whether participants like the acronym. It is whether the process changes observable decision content. Secondary outcomes can include decision time, perceived usability, cognitive burden, psychological safety, confidence calibration, and later recall of rejected alternatives. A process that detects more issues but is too burdensome to use would require redesign.



A second phase should examine field decisions prospectively. The protocol would be applied before a consequential organizational decision and followed through implementation and review. Researchers should resist retrospective success stories because they are especially vulnerable to narrative reconstruction. The most informative cases may be those in which the protocol changes execution but not the final option, or those in which it fails to reveal an important harm that later becomes visible.

MEASUREMENT: WHAT COUNTS AS A TRACE?

Alternative trace: A specific option considered and the reason it was rejected.

Harm trace: A named harm linked to a group, with a judgment about avoidability, reversibility, and mitigation.

Voice trace: A perspective absent from initial data, evidence obtained from that perspective, and whether it altered the decision.

Power trace: A recorded asymmetry in framing, veto, exit, information, or cost bearing.

Encounter trace: A stated post-decision relationship requirement and any justice or repair condition that precedes dialogue.

Legacy trace: A person-dependent capability plus a transfer or redundancy mechanism.

Revision trace: A dated criterion that could require modification, suspension, or reversal.

Dissent trace: A material disagreement preserved in the decision record rather than erased by consensus language.

These traces make the framework vulnerable to disconfirmation. A team can complete a meeting, speak respectfully, and still leave no evidence that a blind spot was examined. Conversely, a process can be uncomfortable, conflictual, and humanistically serious if it exposes cost, power, and disagreement. The audit therefore concerns what the process makes visible, not whether the meeting feels morally satisfying.

RISKS OF MISUSE

The most serious threat to GANDHELA is not rejection but ceremonial adoption. A leader could convene a workshop, move through the eight lenses, listen to stakeholders, and then execute the decision already made. The completed protocol could become a certificate of moral legitimacy. This risk is not hypothetical; any values-based process can be used performatively. Critical leadership scholarship warns against approaches that leave domination intact while improving the language surrounding it (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Collinson, 2017).

Three safeguards follow. First, the process must preserve dissent and rejected alternatives. Second, users must state what changed because of the protocol; if nothing changed, they must explain why the exercise was still informative. Third, affected participants should be able to distinguish consultation from decision rights. A meeting cannot be described as participatory merely because people were invited to speak.

A second risk is acronym capture. Once a memorable label acquires reputation, users may force reality to fit its letters. The architecture therefore treats the acronym as disposable. If empirical work shows that two lenses are redundant, they should be merged. If one adds no observable information, it should be removed. If the sequence creates unnecessary burden, it should be shortened.

A third risk is moral overreach. Humanistic leadership can become soft coercion when leaders pressure injured parties to reconcile, ask employees to display vulnerability in unsafe environments, or frame legitimate



resistance as a failure of empathy. GANDHELA must therefore preserve the legitimacy of boundaries, refusal, separation, and adversarial challenge.

PRACTICAL PROTOCOL FOR ORGANIZATIONS

- 1. Define the decision.** State the decision, deadline, formal authority, genuine constraints, assumptions treated as facts, and consequences of not deciding.
- 2. Govern the decision-maker.** Record interests, fears, incentives, sunk costs, identity commitments, and the view that would be hardest to abandon.
- 3. Map harm.** Separate primary/secondary, reversible/irreversible, avoidable/unavoidable harms; identify cost bearers and mitigations.
- 4. Clarify purpose.** State the legitimate good, beneficiaries, time horizon, and the line that purpose cannot justify crossing.
- 5. Protect dignity and situated humanity.** Identify people reduced to categories, missing lived experience, unheard dissent, and whether consulted groups possess real influence.
- 6. Design the day after.** Specify the relationship needed after the decision, whether repair must precede dialogue, and when separation is appropriate.
- 7. Test absence.** Identify knowledge, relationships, authority, or legitimacy concentrated in one person; create transfer and redundancy.
- 8. Pre-commit to evidence.** Set expected outcomes, harm indicators, review dates, owners, and evidence that would trigger correction.
- 9. Audit power.** Record who framed the problem and alternatives, who can veto or exit, and who bears costs without equivalent authority.
- 10. Close with a decision record.** Document the chosen option, rejected options, reasons, dissent, what changed through deliberation, unresolved issues, and review date.

DISCUSSION: FIRMNESS AND ENCOUNTER

The conceptual center of GANDHELA is not kindness. It is the tension between firmness and encounter. Some decisions require boundaries, sanctions, closure, or rapid commitment. Humanism becomes evasive when it uses dialogue to postpone a responsibility that must be exercised. At the same time, firmness becomes dehumanizing when it converts the other into an object, erases avoidable harm, or treats authority as proof of correctness.

This tension resembles a paradox more than a trade-off that can be permanently solved. Leaders may need to decide without dehumanizing, listen without abdicating, maintain principles without weaponizing them, and acknowledge conflict without making conflict an identity. The objective is not a perfect midpoint. Different situations require different levels of firmness, voice, speed, and repair. The protocol's function is to make the movement explicit and reviewable.

The model also redefines legacy. Leadership literature and organizational culture often celebrate visible impact: the leader who leaves a mark. GANDHELA proposes a more demanding possibility. The mature legacy of leadership may be a system that can preserve what matters without preserving the leader at its center. Being necessary may be a stage of leadership; learning to become unnecessary may be one of its culminations.

This view has practical consequences for founders, academic leaders, family businesses, social movements,



and public institutions. Succession is not an event that begins when a leader announces departure. It is a continuous design problem concerning knowledge, relationships, authority, routines, legitimacy, and the ability of others to disagree with the founder. An organization that cannot survive disagreement with its originator has not fully institutionalized its purpose.

LIMITATIONS

The proposal has substantial limitations. First, it is conceptual and has not yet demonstrated incremental effectiveness. Second, its historical genealogy is selective and cannot substitute for specialized historiography on Gandhi, Ambedkar, Mandela, apartheid, or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Third, translating political and historical tensions into organizational questions risks false equivalence; the model therefore transfers questions, not contexts or moral scales.

Fourth, the eight lenses may overlap. Dignity, situated humanity, and power are analytically distinguishable but may not be empirically separable in practice. Fifth, the process may impose cognitive and temporal costs that make it unsuitable for routine or urgent decisions. Sixth, documentation can create performative compliance rather than genuine reflection. Seventh, the framework may reflect the author's own intellectual preferences and professional history. These are reasons to test and simplify the architecture, not to insulate it.

Finally, the word "humanistic" itself can conceal disagreement. Different ethical traditions will dispute what dignity requires, which harms are acceptable, and how much participation is owed. GANDHELA cannot settle those disagreements. Its more defensible ambition is to expose them before authority converts one interpretation into an apparently neutral decision.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Research should proceed in stages. The first stage is comparative process testing using standardized cases and blind coding of decision traces. The second is prospective field research across sectors, particularly decisions involving restructuring, post-merger integration, succession, institutional conflict, and resource allocation. The third should examine whether specific lenses add unique information or whether a shorter sequence performs equally well.

Cross-cultural research is essential. Concepts such as voice, dignity, authority, encounter, and acceptable conflict are shaped by institutional and cultural contexts. The framework should not assume that one participatory form is universally legitimate. Researchers should examine how the power test behaves in high power-distance environments, family firms, universities, healthcare, public administration, and mission-driven organizations.

Longitudinal research should focus on the "day after." Many leadership studies measure immediate perceptions or outcomes. GANDHELA makes a stronger temporal claim: methods leave residues, and decisions create future relationship and dependency structures. Follow-up should therefore examine trust, turnover, grievance, cooperation, knowledge continuity, and whether promised mitigations were actually implemented.

A final line of research should investigate failure. Cases in which GANDHELA does not change a decision, misses a major harm, or produces ritual compliance may be more theoretically valuable than celebratory applications. A humanistic model should not be judged by how elegantly it explains success after the fact, but by whether it can identify where its own questions were insufficient.

CONCLUSION

GANDHELA began with a simple discomfort: leaders can use morally attractive language while making decisions that leave avoidable harm, silenced voices, damaged relationships, and fragile institutions behind them. The answer proposed here is not another portrait of the ideal leader. It is a provisional discipline of questions.



Gandhi contributes the unsettling idea that means are not merely instruments; they leave residues. Ambedkar interrupts any easy confidence that moral representation is equivalent to genuine voice. Mandela directs attention to the day after conflict, when people and institutions must still inhabit a shared reality. Together, these tensions are translated into self-governance, harm containment, purpose, dignity, situated humanity, encounter, institutional legacy, and verifiable action, all crossed by a persistent audit of power.

The model should be judged by a demanding standard: does it reveal something consequential that a credible alternative would miss, and does that discovery improve the quality, reversibility, or accountability of the decision? If not, GANDHELA should shrink. If its questions become useful enough to survive without its name, that may be a stronger form of success than institutionalizing the acronym itself. A humanistic architecture should ultimately help people act differently when the decision is difficult—and leave institutions stronger when the person who introduced the questions is no longer in the room.

The larger proposition is therefore not that leaders must become indispensable moral heroes. It is almost the opposite. Transformative leadership should be capable of firmness without dehumanization, encounter without abdication, purpose without moral blank cheques, and legacy without dependency. The next decisive test is not whether GANDHELA sounds persuasive on paper. It is whether, in a difficult decision, it helps people see something consequential early enough to act differently—and whether the institution becomes stronger than the person who introduced the questions.

REFERENCES

1. Alvesson, M., & Spicer, A. (2012). Critical leadership studies: The case for critical performativity. *Human Relations*, 65(3), 367–390. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726711430555>
2. Ambedkar, B. R. (1945). What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables. Thacker & Co.
3. Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, W. L. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 315–338. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001>
4. Banks, G. C., Davis McCauley, K., Gardner, W. L., & Guler, C. E. (2016). A meta-analytic review of authentic and transformational leadership: A test for redundancy. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(4), 634–652. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.02.006>
5. Banks, G. C., Gooty, J., Ross, R. L., Williams, C. E., & Harrington, N. T. (2018). Construct redundancy in leader behaviors: A review and agenda for the future. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 29(1), 236–251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.12.005>
6. Biswas, S. (2024). The Poona Pact, Indian National Congress and the descriptive and substantive representation of Dalits in colonial India. *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 21(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S147959142300044X>
7. Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(6), 595–616. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.004>
8. Brown, M. E., Treviño, L. K., & Harrison, D. A. (2005). Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 97(2), 117–134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2005.03.002>
9. Collinson, D. (2017). Critical leadership studies: A response to Learmonth and Morrell. *Leadership*, 13(3), 272–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715017694559>
10. Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., van Dierendonck, D., & Liden, R. C. (2019). Servant leadership: A systematic review and call for future research. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 30(1), 111–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004>
11. Gandhi, M. K. (1958–1994). The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi (Vols. 1–100). Publications Division, Government of India.
12. Gardner, W. L., Cogliser, C. C., Davis, K. M., & Dickens, M. P. (2011). Authentic leadership: A review of the literature and research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(6), 1120–1145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.09.007>
13. Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). The servant as leader. Robert K. Greenleaf Center.



14. Haveman, H. A., & Khaire, M. V. (2004). Survival beyond succession? The contingent impact of founder succession on organizational failure. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 19(3), 437–463. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026\(03\)00039-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026(03)00039-9)
15. Hazama, E. (2023). Unravelling the myth of Gandhian non-violence: Why did Gandhi connect his principle of Satyāgraha with the ‘Hindu’ notion of Ahimsā? *Modern Intellectual History*, 20(1), 116–140. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000014>
16. Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. Harvard University Press.
17. Lee, J. M., Yoon, D., & Boivie, S. (2020). Founder CEO succession: The role of CEO organizational identification. *Academy of Management Journal*, 63(1), 224–245. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2017.0091>
18. Maak, T., & Pless, N. M. (2006). Responsible leadership in a stakeholder society: A relational perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 66, 99–115. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-006-9047-z>
19. Mamdani, M. (2007). Amnesty or impunity? A preliminary critique of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC). In S. Peté & M. du Plessis (Eds.), *Repairing the past? International perspectives on reparations for gross human rights abuses* (pp. 83–118). Intersentia. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781839700798.006>
20. Mantena, K. (2012). Another realism: The politics of Gandhian nonviolence. *American Political Science Review*, 106(2), 455–470. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305541200010X>
21. National Transportation Safety Board. (2010). Loss of thrust in both engines after encountering a flock of birds and subsequent ditching on the Hudson River, US Airways Flight 1549 (Aircraft Accident Report NTSB/AAR-10/03).
22. Pless, N. M., & Maak, T. (Eds.). (2012). *Responsible leadership*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-3995-6>
23. Smith, W. K. (2014). Dynamic decision making: A model of senior leaders managing strategic paradoxes. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(6), 1592–1623. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.0932>
24. Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2011). Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organizing. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 381–403. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.0223>
25. Sutcliffe, K. M. (2011). High reliability organizations (HROs). *Best Practice & Research Clinical Anaesthesiology*, 25(2), 133–144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bpa.2011.03.001>
26. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa. (1998–2003). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa report (Vols. 1–7)*. Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Republic of South Africa.

APPENDIX A. GANDHELA DECISION RECORD

Decision definition. Decision, deadline, formal authority, non-negotiable constraints, assumptions, consequence of no decision.

Self-governance. Interests, fears, incentives, recognition needs, sunk costs, hardest opinion to abandon.

Harm containment. Primary and secondary harms; reversible/irreversible; avoidable/unavoidable; cost bearer; mitigation.

Purpose. Legitimate good, beneficiaries, horizon, accepted costs, non-negotiable ethical boundary.

Dignity and situated humanity. People treated as categories; missing experiences; consulted voices; voices with real power; unrepresented dissent.

Encounter. Necessary post-decision relationship; desirable but nonessential relationship; separation conditions; repair before reconciliation.

Institutional legacy. Knowledge, relationship, authority and legitimacy dependencies; transfer mechanism; absence test.



Verifiable action. Expected result; indicators; harms to monitor; early warnings; review date; owner; correction/reversal evidence.

Power control. Who defined the problem and alternatives; veto; exit; cost without equivalent authority; challenge mechanism.

Closure. Chosen and rejected alternatives; reasons; dissent; what changed because of the protocol; unresolved issues; review date.