

Leadership Insight – Simon Bolivar

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Simon Bolivar has been described as a ‘thinker, liberator and reformer’. Born in 1783 in Venezuela - into a wealthy family - he spent time during his informative years in Paris (from 1803) experiencing first-hand the leadership style of none other than Napoleon Bonaparte – a revolutionary leader himself. A keen student and observer of government and enlightenment – he became obsessed with the notion of breaking free from the chains of the Spanish in his home country. This drive and associated energy became hallmarks of his political and military career.

See - [simon Boliver: Thinker, Liberator, Reformer \(teachdemocracy.org\)](https://teachdemocracy.org/simon-bolivar-thinker-liberator-reformer)

Bolivar went on to join the Venezuelan independence movement and became a significant political and military leader. His leadership style can be considered under a number of headings -

Strategic alliances

Bolivar believed in the importance of maintaining alliances establishing and maintaining these alliances (friendships) with like-minded revolutionaries of the time. Critical to success was the concept of alliances – and to some degree loyalty. *This provides an interesting parallel to modern leadership models.*

Use of clever tactics

Carefully considering the risks associated with his various strategies – he was regarded as a brilliant tactician. There was little doubt that he was prepared to take big risks – which usually ended in big achievements. He considered risk to be part of good warfare – and the development of a range of clever tactics that usually led to success. *Strategy was essential – so too putting that strategy into practice.*

Democratic views with dictatorial leanings

Bolivar was an advocate of independence (essentially democracy) – but did have dictatorial tendencies. He was able to marry the contradictions effectively (though not necessarily well received by all) and maintained what we would most likely refer to as a ‘benevolent dictatorship’.

See - [10 Facts About Simon Bolivar of Venezuela \(thoughtco.com\)](https://thoughtco.com/10-facts-about-simon-bolivar-of-venezuela/)

Use of own funds

Bolivar funded independence movements from his own family fortune. He believed so strongly in his cause that he was prepared to invest, personally, in them. A number of his causes seriously depleted his funds – but he was adamant, throughout, that important causes must be supported personally.

Charisma

By all accounts Bolivar was, in fact, a charismatic military leader – despite having no formal training in the domain. He was able to harness loyalty and nationalism through action and word. He was also acknowledged for his governance skills.

See - [10 Facts About Simón Bolívar, Liberator of South America | History Hit](#)

Bolivar – despite his failings and losses – became a significant and enduring cultural figure – and this was acknowledged in 1998 by a change in the name of Venezuela to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela – a significant tribute indeed. Reading various accounts of his life and times (he died in 1830 – aged 43) his sheer determination, resoluteness and commitment were key ingredients of his lasting legacy.

Emeritus Professor Greg Whateley has recently retired from the position of Deputy Vice Chancellor (UBSS) and Chief Executive (GCA). He celebrates 50 years in academia in 2024.