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HAUSMAN: This is David Hausman and I'm here with Director General Mavuso Msimang from the Department of Home Affairs at the Protea Hotel in Midrand. Director-General Msimang, have you agreed to this interview?

MSIMANG: *Yes, I have agreed. I'm very happy to talk with you.*

HAUSMAN: Great. I wanted to start by asking you a bit about your background and the jobs that brought you to being Director-General at the Department of Home Affairs.

MSIMANG: *My background might shock you. I was born 68 years ago. When I was at university, South Africa was in turmoil and I was one of the people who left the country to go and prepare to fight against apartheid, using war if necessary. I was a member of the African National Congress (ANC). Eventually, I spent 30 years in exile out of South Africa involved both in the political struggle and in the military struggle against the regime, and other regimes in southern Africa such as the Rhodesian one. But eventually, it was nice that we were able to come back home—for me in 1993, fully 30 years after I had been out of the country. So that's my background. I did, while I was abroad, attend university in Zambia where I did a Ph.D. majoring in entomology and biochemistry. Before that I studied in South Africa at Fort Hare. My studies were interrupted when I had to go to prepare for the liberation of the country. I did an MBA also with the U.S. (United States) International University in San Diego, but I used the Nairobi-Kenya campus for my studies. I majored in project management.*

I did a number of international jobs while I was abroad, working mainly with international development agencies such as CARE Canada, something CARE called CARE International—there is a CARE US branch, CARE Canada, and CARE Britain, and other countries. I was their country representative in Kenya, I think from 1987 to 1990.

I also worked for the World University Service of Canada because Canada had become my adopted country and I was their representative in Ethiopia at the height of the famine when for a long time Haile Selassie, Emperor Haile Selassie, had hidden the fact that there was a serious famine. But one journalist, now dead, unfortunately, Mo, I think Mohammad (Amin), went in there with cameras and suddenly around 1984 news of the famine was brought to the screen, to the television screen of people around the world.

Why did I do what I did? When I came, I could have opted for a political career path because I did occupy very senior positions in the liberation struggle. But I thought there would be enough people to deal with that and I wanted to focus more on issues of management. When I came back to South Africa I started working with an NGO (nongovernmental organization), which was funded by the EU (European Union). The aim was to try and assist rural development communities. There was good funding for that. The assistance was in the areas of agriculture, of educare, which was educating and caring for kids, disadvantaged, environmental management, water reticulation—things like that. It was a very interesting experience for me because you had a group of people who had been very active in the struggle and felt that they now deserved to get something back. It came in the form of this project.

But there were serious issues of accountability. People didn't really believe that they needed to be accountable to the donor who sits somewhere in Europe and essentially, one was saying, "they're giving you their money, but if you don't want

to account to them, let's devise a system in which you can account to the people that you're supposed to be representing," the communities that you are assisting.

In the end, that project really came to an end. The structural relationship between the benficials, which were these organizations, and the resource provider proved to be fundamentally flawed. And so it didn't work. Turnaround, you asked me about the turnaround and efforts that I had been involved in, and I think this is really what interests you. When I was recruited into the South African National Parks, there were two things about that that were unusual. One was, of course, this being South Africa I was the first black CEO of the organization and dealing with a number of conservation professionals who had been placed in the organization as much for their professional skills as for their alliance to the previous government. So there was a little bit of an issue there, which needed to be managed.

The second and even more important issue was that of a non-conservationist being asked to manage a conservation organization. Conservation people are extremely conservative and in some instances fairly arrogant. They really believe that they understand the world much more than other people. That to me was a greater challenge than being black. But the challenges one found there were: "A," although the national parks looked after so many prime tourist assets, there wasn't much attention being paid to revenue collection because the government was always there to finance them. That was number one.

The second one was that black people had been marginalized—had actually been excluded from visiting the national parks by the apartheid system, which actually made it illegal to visit certain places. You grew up in the States at a time when all these things were gone, Jim Crow and all of that, the time of Martin Luther King. What you were facing then was what we continued to face until about fifteen years ago in South Africa. So the transformation had to do with changing the mindset and getting people to understand that competence, more than skin color, was of utmost importance in the work place.

At the same time that you are doing that, to make those who were coming in, who were being given the opportunity, to understand that they needed to earn the right to work there and to be promoted and be regarded well. How did one go about what was really—what stood out in what I think everybody agreed was the success story in the transformation, turning around of the South African National Parks? I think two or three things.

In order to be able to collect sufficient revenue—well, number one the philosophy was that as much as possible the parks should be able to finance themselves, not entirely, but they should. An attempt should be made for parks to finance themselves. In other words, conservation had to contribute to its own sustenance. How did we go about achieving that? We invited the private sector to establish high-end lodges within carefully selected areas in the park. We invited the private sector also to run some of the retail outlets that were found in the park and also to manage, it was retail outlets, it was accommodations. So they needed to do that.

That was what conservationists always feared that they would be importing somebody who was not a conservationist who would start bringing in commercialization. The ethos there is that parks are sacred; you can't just bring anybody to roam around there. Commercialization would have the effect of

devaluing the parks. It is almost like you'd be having light bulbs, and emblems, and posters all over, which of course was quite wrong.

We then also, a key thing was to get black people to be friendly to the parks. There were lots of black communities in the neighborhood who had always been regarded as poachers and therefore would be kept out. So we had to change their attitude and make it friendly towards the park. Really the trick there was to include them in discussions around conservation and give them an opportunity to run, those who needed to run who were business-minded, to fix roles, to supply, to do some laundry, services, provide laundry services for the park, and all of that. That really changed attitudes, in a very short period of time.

You had people who had always been very hostile to the park becoming extremely friendly, because they suddenly saw it as a benefit. The commercial accommodation facilities, built by the private sector, owned by the government—because this is state land and leased to them—built by these guys and leased back to them over a period of twenty years, it was later changed to twenty-five. It was a model that also worked like magic. So people would come from all over the world, they still do now, to pay the top dollar to be in Kruger National Park. But this was all done without crowding out the local people. We never touched the accommodation facilities that were always in the park. Instead we selected places in areas that were particularly suited to small establishments, no more than twenty or thirty people, but where there was wonderful game viewing, etcetera.

When I left National Parks—am I talking too much? And I left National Parks, really—the government, the public—everybody thought we had done a good job.

HAUSMAN: Great. Let me ask you now about when you arrived at Home Affairs, when you were appointed Director-General, what you saw as the most important challenges and the things you wanted to address first.

MSIMANG: *At Home Affairs, the biggest challenge was that of addressing issues of inefficiency, corruption, and of course, addressing issues of financial management because of the problems that had built up as a result of the mismanagement. And to also restore staff morale, to have happy people working there. Those were really the key challenges.*

HAUSMAN: I've heard a lot about the strategy of quick wins in the department. Can you describe how you decided which things to focus on for quick wins?

MSIMANG: *The quick wins had to do with doing things that would convince the public that there was change happening, things that you could do quite quickly, for which you didn't need to invest too much money, too much time and too much in the form of resources—too many people. These were things like business process reengineering. We took a look at why it took so long to produce an ID, an identity token. When I arrived there on average really you got your ID after 127, 137 days. We looked at why that was happening. That didn't require money, it required people who understood business processes to cut out those loops that you didn't need. Not only would this quicken the time but it would also cut out some of the corruption, because as these documents went around and around, they got into too many hands.*

I'm sure you may have been told that the 127 days it took to produce an ID involved eighty handlings of the document from the beginning of the application

to the time when somebody got their ID. This was cut down to no more than fifteen. We needed and got really good business process experts, and in no time we're taking the numbers down. We targeted sixty days within which to produce an ID and we achieved that. In the second year, we're down to about forty. So that didn't require too much investment of money and time. That was one of the quick wins.

Also while this was pioneered by experts, the trick was to get at the end of each day the group of people who were working on a particular aspect of ID production to sit and review the work they had done and plan what they would do tomorrow. Before they started doing anything the following day, they checked the scores, so to say. They started making comparisons over time and began to try and understand why there were loops in productivity. All of that was carefully taken down, written down, and it would refer back to the people. There were incentives given in the form of recognition. A board went up to say, "So-and-so did his fingerprints in such and such a period of time, and this day so-and-so scanned 1,200, so there you had an increase of more than 100%." But the recognition motivated people, and the education on how to evaluate your work and plan better. It was really more a question of planning that assisted very much. So that was a real quick turnaround as far as IDs are concerned.

Then, of course, what we also did and some of this took time, we looked at contracting South Africa for the vast distribution network. At the time, we would hire the company that would collect applications from various offices and take them to a head office in Pretoria, and then there was a different company that took documents back from Pretoria to the different places. We said, "No, why can't we use the same company?" We'd get to know them better and the turnaround, literal turnaround, can be calculated in terms of 'you can collect it and you deliver it there,' but with the whole site.

The other thing that we did was change the payment system to these couriers. As long as the field office hired the courier to do this, they would quite naturally want to conserve on funds and they wouldn't want them to go back with a bag that was half full. The tendency was to wait until the bag of applications was full before paying money to allow the courier to take the stuff to head office. So we said, forget about that. Efficiency is much more important in this case than cost. So we centralized the payment of this. So those guys didn't bother how many times these people came, as long, in fact, they wanted them to come as frequently as possible because we then also introduced competition and the results would be published. This is the office that did the best; this is the province that has done the best. These are laggards who are lagging behind.

So little things like really enabled a transformation to take place, really without too much investment of money and time and that's how we achieved some of the turnover.

HAUSMAN: To what extent did you apply things that you'd learned from the National Parks in this process in Home Affairs? Was it very different or were some some of the same principles that—?

MSIMANG: *It is a very different environment, but I think it is more a question of the attitudes to managing people, the relationships between the managers and the managed, if you will. For people to delegate as much as possible. I've always believed in decentralization of decision making so that the people closest to the place where a decision must be made, which is the field, are empowered sufficiently to be*

able to take that decision, and then just monitor how it is performed and put in the necessary curbs if it became necessary to ensure that the thing was done successfully and without any violation. That is one. Another was to—decentralization, well decentralization went together with empowerment. So for those too, yes, it didn't—you needed to give people confidence that they could do things, it's delegation.

HAUSMAN: How do you go about giving people that kind of confidence?

MSIMANG: *Well we would hold discussion groups, workshops, and we would sit around the table and I as the CEO would sit with ten, or nine, eight people and we would find out how they saw the job, the challenges, how they related. You know I'd give them assurance every time that "guys, I would like you to be as free as possible in expressing yourself." I want to guarantee you upfront that anybody who criticizes management, including myself, will not be fired. I want to repeat this. I know I'm not always going to be able to defend you from others who might find an excuse for firing you, but please understand this. Feel free to criticize me; you will not be fired as a result of it.*

That gave people the confidence to speak up, to be free, to criticize constructively. There would always be a mix of people who are not serious and the ones that are serious. You know, "We don't understand why management does things like this, that and the other." We could easily take this approach and some people started really coming out.

I remember a guy—I'm talking about Home Affairs now—he said, "You've got people standing in lines here. What would it cost to put a screen, a television screen there, that tells people—let's say that plays music so that people are entertained while they're here, just play some music. Let's do some good signage." A lot of people only discovered when they get to your counter that we find that they're looking only for information. So if we told them where the information desk is they would go there, find that and go away. A lot of these things didn't come from experts or from head office; they came from people who were there.

I think once they gained the confidence, once you sat with them and shared a drink with them at the end of the evening—it also was so important when we got together—maybe with the people who were with the head office. You just sit and talk about our lives. I tell them about who I am without overwhelming them with anything and then you say that here we're—you ask about their family life, sensitively, and so on, and people would just open up and really feel that they were taken seriously, cared for and so on. I think that really plays a big role. I found that to work in whichever institution I work. I really end up being more of a threat to managers than to the people on the ground.

HAUSMAN: Is that something that you probably learned from roles that you had in the struggle?

MSIMANG: *I think some of it, oh yes, the struggle was a great leveler. You must know that when we sat outside it was people with degrees, good education, with no education, and everybody was together in a camp and you've got to know and respect people's individual capabilities. Some of the commanders are guys with very little school but because they had courage and they would go to the field and lead, they could read maps and they were courageous. They earned that respect. I learned that education is a wonderful thing but it is not the be all in*

determining the character and leadership. When we went into dangerous areas, nobody asked whether you had a degree or not, it was serious—will that guy go to the trenches there—and so I really learned to have a great, great deal of respect for character, for ordinary people.

So I don't know whether some of it is my own nature. I think I'm blessed with not being too complicated, impressed by things. I respect people's achievements, qualifications and so on, but I think I'm lucky to really relate very, very well with ordinary people. As I say sometimes my relationships with these people on the ground tends to be a bit of a threat as people think, are you likely to undermine us by going down to talk to the people? No, no, no, the principles of management are very clear, I'm not going to—I'm going to—I talk to the people. So I think as I see it, that's how it was.

HAUSMAN: Did you do a lot of actually going among people lower down in the department and motivating them?

MSIMANG: *I don't think in any of the jobs that I've done anyone visited the field more than I did. It was very—I think at one time we calculated that I was achieving about 48% of my time out in the field. It was a lot really because it is not easy in these institutions. There are meetings; you are accountable to superiors who want internal meetings, meetings with stakeholders, meetings with government who is a shareholder. It is a lot, it is easy not to be in the field. But I always attached a lot of value in going to talk to the people on the ground. That's what they would say to me if you were to ask them about what style of management—.*

HAUSMAN: And what sorts of things did you do when you went into the field to talk to people?

MSIMANG: *It was always, what's our—it's motivation. You're kind of talking about Home Affairs, which is a very difficult environment because of its association with incompetence, with corruption, etcetera. You'd say to the guys something like, "You know that if we could turn this thing around we would be the most popular people in South Africa." Can you imagine? Everybody in this country and those who visit at one time or another must come to our office. You know we are privileged to serve people and give them birth certificate, it is really a privilege that they must come to you and I write and put my name on your birth certificate and to a marriage certificate. The ID is issued by—can you imagine, with all the difficulty that people are experiencing if you would just say to somebody you'll get your passport, your ID, in two weeks and not in six or eight weeks? That kind of service, the satisfaction that we get as an individual, it's marvelous. It gives me great kicks as a person to do that. Then you'll find that people will then strive to achieve those things. I think it is motivation and giving people the—making people believe in themselves that they can achieve those things.*

Also, really treating them always with respect. What I always used to say to people is that I don't look at the watch when it comes to managing you. I'd say, I've seen so-and-so dim the lights in his office at 7 o'clock in the evening when I left here. I'm not going to go and see when he got to the office in the morning. I assume that responsible people work as long as they need to or when it is necessary. If you've got problems at home, lets respect procedure, but I don't expect a manager to say you can't go home to fix a problem because it's working time—because they never stop you when you stay overtime and not even claim overtime. You know, that kind of recognition that really makes them feel appreciated.

HAUSMAN: That actually brings up another area that I'm interest in, which is absenteeism in the department. I've heard that it has been reduced quite a lot, at least in some parts of the department and I wondered how you think that's been done.

MSIMANG: *Again it is really—well, I think we can still go much further to reduce absenteeism but a significant reduction has occurred. It must have to do with a variety of things. Number one, people start to love their job when they go to the office and feel it is worthwhile being there because you are saying they are serving the public, and they are proud of that. That they are appreciated makes a lot of difference, that they are regarded as adults, as people who can think on their own. When you say, I'm not as a leader—I'm really more of a coordinator. You know what's supposed to be done. I exist merely to make sure that the different units have some kind of synergy, not to tell you what you know, because you know it better than me. I think it is that kind of motivation that assists an organization to get these people there. But I'll tell you one thing, we are a rather big organization and we've been steeped in negative culture for a very long time. I must say, reluctantly, that there are people whom just won't change. Not because they can't change, but because they really see no value in changing. They too have an influence on others, particularly if you don't get quickly up to speed in terms of dispensing justice, whether it is in the form of disciplining people who are not performing well—because otherwise people wonder why they have to do so much, and at the end of the day, everybody is paid similarly.*

So I think when people do something that is wrong, it is important that they're seen to be chastised, and it is not as if you must always be handing out—I think stick is important, but so is carrot. But stick really comes right at the tail end. But when you talk to people and it's quite clear that they will not change, then in the interest of this organization, you must find a way of moving them out. And fairness also goes a long way towards motivating people.

I've had managers who are very strict and whom you'd think a little on the rough side, but I've heard those, they supervise saying "but he is very fair". I think they believe "he is fair, he is not doing this against me," and that goes along way.

HAUSMAN: How do you reconcile this kind of consultative leadership with the very specific targets that were set for people in various stages?

MSIMANG: *It is the consultative leadership that produces results. That's what—you agree in the morning. I mean consultative versus authoritarian, you could yell out an instruction via an email or bark it in the morning and say, "I want this thing to be reached," and so on. Maybe people will do that, but they may not do it with as much happiness as if you come around from time to time: "hey guys, It looks like we might not be able to make it today, what's happening," and so on. It's always encouraging rather than saying, "It's 3 o'clock and we're still here? Why have we—." I think if you have the consultative approach, "why do you think we didn't make it yesterday. Oh, you know, for fifteen minutes the power supply was down." Whereas if you didn't really seek to understand what the problems were, you could easily come to a wrong conclusion.*

HAUSMAN: Something I've been very interested in is how people have accepted the targets set for them—which depending on the context could seem very demanding— and whether people have presented resistance.

MSIMANG: *Yes, but you agree collectively on the target, you don't dictate it, and you agree based on some experience. You do your trail runs and find that people achieve*

higher targets than what they're doing and say, "Okay guys, I think it's possible to do this, shall we all commit to doing 800 instead of 600?" And if they say, "No, no, no, we cannot do that." Sometimes they'll even suggest, "No, I think we can do 1000." "No, no, no, not 1000 I don't want any favors, let's keep it at such-and-such. We will look at it in a week again and see whether we can go to 1000 or not." Then they find sometimes that 1000 is difficult, but they feel that they're participating. This number has not been imposed on them. It is really the participation, the getting it out of the group. I think it does the trick.

The targets did not come from somewhere—from the head office. No one said, "Guys, ID's ought to be done in 30 days." In fact, we have said to people, in an ideal world we should be able to produce an ID in two, three days. But we are a country that is diverse, that has distances, that is under-developed in this manner or the other, so let's look at something that is realistic. Then they discuss and accept this. The short answer is I don't think it is difficult to achieve a target that people have themselves identified and agreed as necessary, a lot of the time, almost all the time. You would impose a higher target if you were dealing with a demotivated group and that happens sometimes and you deal—.

If there is a group there, competition too is very important, if you are able to achieve it. If there is a group that is achieving 800 and another that is achieving 700, you'd say, "Why can they do it," and find a way of motivating harder. So it is incentives. "Thank you guys, you did a good job, I know you can do it." You're coming up with these things. "You can't be beaten by that group." Competition and so on.

HAUSMAN: To what extent were you personally involved in discussions like that?

MSIMANG: *Very much so. When I was claiming a little earlier that I do not think that there is a CEO or DG who visited the field more than I did, my claim is absolutely correct. Contact with these people at the lowest level is absolutely vital for their morale, absolutely. I was personally involved. But of course, you must understand that you are not the organization. There is a need to build a team.*

HAUSMAN: Can you describe how you went about building a team?

MSIMANG: *You identify some good guys. We are differently skilled, differently gifted and as you sit in meetings and discuss you find out who has what strengths in what things and you deploy those people appropriately in places where you think they can optimize on their skills. But you get people to accept that this is teamwork. But you also get them to buy into the philosophy that you lead—I may be wrong here, but I think the results prove this in a limited fashion otherwise. I would say, "It is sheer coincidence that I am the leader, it could have been you. If you cast this thing, threw the die, it pointed to me. I have a master's degree. Three or four of you have master's degrees too. So really, I may be older than many people, I may be older than you. So strictly speaking there is nothing in me as myself that singles me out in leadership. So I'm not going to expect you to do less than I do. You are as capable as I am. In some instances, in some cases, some of you are more capable than me." The other principle that I always use is that "guys don't be territorial, don't be insecure." "Give the people you manage space to shine," I always say to them. When they shine and produce results, the credit will come to me because I am in charge.*

So if you are working with a unit there which performs exceptionally well, don't worry that they will be saying, "John is doing well," and so on, they will say, "wow,

that guy's unit is doing well." So the kudos come to you. And you repeat this more and more and people start relaxing and actually, you would be amazed in these scenarios, how much people actually hog the work and prevent people from coming in because that might show them off as not terribly good. You know you're brilliant if you work for me. I am so comfortable with you. It doesn't matter that somebody comes and says, "Gee, Mavuso is the CEO but that guys much brighter." That's okay, when we publish results and when people talk about my institution they say, "Okay, I've achieved things," so that's good, that's good for me and I acknowledge, that's another one, publically. When people say. "Wow, you guys have turned it around," I say, "You know, I don't think it would have happened without that guy." You know he pushed it and also speaking in the media, to the media. "One outstanding fellow here who actually came up with the solution was so and so. I tell you we would still be so far behind." This is telling the public, and people feel——. So it's those things.

HAUSMAN: What sorts of measures have you put in place to ensure that these changes will be sustainable?

MSIMANG: *Well it is very difficult, I must confess. I am always sure that it will be sustainable. If you're talking about the Department of Home Affairs, I'm ending my term shortly; it will have been a three-year term. I think we need much longer than that to build capacity, to build confidence. My hope is really that the foundation that has been laid can be built on by others. But if those who will come after us don't have the same attitude to the people, don't enjoy the same confidences, then there is always a risk that things could falter. I saw it happening with SITA, where the state——from the National Parks I went to run the State Information Technology Agency, SITA.*

The government wanted to close the institution down because of the ineptitude, the corruption, and the inefficiency. In three years the government said, "Wow." They started giving us big contracts, big projects to implement, the industry——the IT industry. "Wow, that's what you should be doing guys, don't compete with us, facilitate our access within a controlled environment to government business." Then also, the turnaround in tender. Again it would take a hundred plus days to complete the adjudication of a tender. We took it down to 70 and so on, which is a reasonable period of time——actually, the most efficient given the period that you must give people time.

So unfortunately, and this is an issue of leadership, when I left the State IT Agency after four years, the board was very hesitant, indecisive. There were some very good people within management, at least two of them could have taken over my job and I have no doubts that one of them at least would have done much better than me. I'm not being falsely modest, because he was well grounded in management and in finance and he also had a strong IT background. For some reason, I don't know whether they were looking for politically accepted people or whatever it is they were looking for, they started losing these people. The institution is ailing now. It is in the intensive care unit. So I'm not going to shout too prematurely about having laid a foundation for sustainability. National Parks is one institution where succession was very good. The guy who used to run Kruger Park took over from me, Kruger Park is the biggest of all the national parks we have here. He has kept it and it is going higher and higher and I'm very happy with that, I'm very proud of that. I'm not proud of what has happened to the other institutions.

Home Affairs, I think, I'm not sure, I think a lot more work—it's a big institution, it is over 7000 people. We really need more time. What shall I say, because you are researcher? I think, it is also that there are some flaws in the structure and the distribution of responsibilities at executive and management levels. It doesn't quite work like in the private sector where the director general is CEO and the minister is chairman, non-executive chairman. The minister is invested with a lot of power that goes right into the responsibilities of a CEO. For instance, the appointment of people at the top level. This is the responsibility of the minister. So you can imagine the CEO who is given—all things going well, there is good participation and agreement, and he should be appointed. But where that doesn't happen, and I've seen it not happen, you end up managing people that you really don't like because you don't think they are okay.

But with power to appoint at that level, versus in the middle—so there is a built-in conflict right there, which is really an affront to good management. The other thing of course is that governments—this was the first direct government; I had been in public institutions but not right in government. But the rules, the regulations are sometimes, a lot of the time work against efficiency. The standardization, for instance, in the hierarchical setup of the government department, any government department will have a DG (director general), a DDG (deputy director general), a chief director, a director, a deputy director, then assistant director. By the time you come to normal people this whole pile of people is sitting at the top. Now some of the departments manage agriculture, but others manage information and documents like us. You can do things with a very, very flat structure—for instance, in Home Affairs.

But I guess it wouldn't be very easy for an institution of government, or a department of government, I suppose it is much easier to standardize and make things like that, and there are costs to doing that. People don't look at the functions. Some are policy oriented, like developing education syllabi, standards and so on. But others are operational like the Department of Home Affairs, which must be out there, giving out IDs, that's a good case. So you can't really manage them, sticking with the same kind of structure. Something suffers if you standardize.

HAUSMAN: Great. Well I know we're running out of time, so thanks so much. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MSIMANG: *No, but thank you for your interest in what we do.*

HAUSMAN: Thank you.