



An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel on Decision-Making and Power

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This expository essay considers the story of King David and juxtaposes critical elements of his life with the praxis of organizational behavior and design. It uses the study of decision-making and types of power to evaluate the life of King David in 1 and 2 Samuel. The essay also highlights the effectiveness of David's decision-making acumen. David's experiences will be layered with French and Raven's bases of power to uncover the imbrications thereof and provide modern-day leaders with a stronger decision-making foundation and improve their effectiveness as they navigate through the wild waters of organizational challenges.

The First Book of Samuel recounts the story of King Saul's extraordinary rise to power and influence and his subsequent tragic fall. The author highlights Saul's tragic flaw – his disobedience of God's commands which ultimately leads to God's rejection. In the process, Saul quickly loses his courage and becomes jealous of young David's growing success. From the ashes of tragedy, God would raise up another king who would obey the directives of the true King, the God of Israel. Much of the activity in First Samuel is associated with the life, reign, and decline of Saul, contrasted with the rapid rise of the young and faithful David. Although the Book of Ruth 4:18-22 introduces the genealogy of David, First and Second Samuel report the specifics of David's rise to power, as well as reveal the successes and failures of his decision-making acumen. What is King David's story? What elements of organizational behavior are present in the Books of Samuel? What learnings can we take away from the decisions David made, both good and bad? How might those learnings help leaders and decision-makers better understand the complexities of power as they make decisions in a modern-day organizational environment?

Highlights of the Story of David

The Books of Samuel form part of the narrative history of Israel in the Nevi'im or "prophets" section of the Old Testament called the Deuteronomistic history (Gordon,

1999). Along with Joshua, Judges, and Kings, the Books of Samuel are part of the series of books that comprise a theological history of the Israelites that explain God's law for Israel under the guidance of the prophets (Dick, 2004). First Samuel follows David's rise and journey to the throne, justifying him as a legitimate successor to Saul. First and Second Samuel allow readers to witness God entering into an eternal covenant with David while promising divine protection of the dynasty of Jerusalem through all time.

David is introduced as a young shepherd who gained fame as a musician and by killing the Philistine champion, Goliath. He quickly became a favorite of King Saul and a close friend of Jonathan, Saul's son. Worried that David would attempt to steal his throne, Saul would eventually turn on David with a vengeance. After Saul and Jonathan are killed in battle, David is anointed as king and goes on to conquer Jerusalem, taking the Ark of the Covenant into the city, and establishing the kingdom founded by Saul.

As a man after God's own heart, David's faith was exemplary, so much so, that centuries later God was pleased to be called "the God of your father David" (2 Kings 20:5; Isaiah 38:5). David contributed to the worship of the Lord by building the temple (2 Chronicles 28:11-29:2) and by authoring numerous psalms (2 Samuel 23:1). Inspired through the Lord's guidance, Samuel had initially traveled to Bethlehem to interview the sons of Jesse, so that he might set apart one of them for a high dignity in the future history of the Hebrew commonwealth. After rejecting seven of his sons, Jesse was asked to disrupt David from tending sheep. Samuel 16:12-13 described the scenario as follows:

Now he was ruddy with bright eyes, and good looking. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!" Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward (1 Samuel 16:12-13).

According to Steel (2011), David was a genius poet and musician singing his own Hebrew melodies and dedicating them to the praise of Jehovah. David played the harp often and "beguiled the loitering day or the weary night, as he watched his flocks" (Steel, p. 1). David was intimately acquainted with the Word of God and set many heroes of faith and biblical events of grace to music.

The anointment with olive oil was considered a religious ritual which consecrated him to the kingship. David was now strengthened by God's Holy Spirit for the work of ruling God's people, just as Saul had been previously (1 Samuel 10:10). In his distressing situation, Saul requested David's presence to help calm his sullen nature. David left Bethlehem on a donkey and traveled directly to Saul, where he quickly found favor and became Saul's armorbearer. Empowered by the Spirit of God, David skillfully played his harp, drove away the distressing spirit, and provided Saul with temporary relief.

David's influence and power quickly grew after triumphing over the 9-foot, 9-inch Philistine, Goliath. The decision David made to place his faith in the Lord combined with the courage he demonstrated in challenging the Philistine "champion" is legendary. In fact, David's achievements became widely known among the Philistines. David's successful military campaigns also gained him increased honor and recognition. Despite Saul's anger and resentment, David continually remained loyal to Saul. Today, the story of David's victory over the giant is used as inspiration to encourage sports teams, corporate employees, developing leaders, and the next generation, providing hope and strength in challenging situations. Indeed, the Goliath has become a universal metaphor for obstacles in life, both personally and organizationally (Marshall, 2006).

David's power and influence rapidly grew over the Israelites, and he quickly gained the loyal support of Saul's son, Jonathan. Throughout the Books of Samuel, David and Jonathan consistently appealed to the covenant of their friendship, even though Jonathan was well aware of the ancient custom that a new king would kill the offspring of his predecessor. From a leadership and organizational behavior perspective, the researcher begins to see the numerous forms of power theories weaved within the tapestry of interactions between David and the other characters in Scripture. Elements of organizational behavior could readily be observed in the decision-making process of David and the situations he faced.

In First Samuel 19, with the help of his wife, Michal, David decided to escape Saul's anger. Michal had shown exceptional heroism and a great devotion to David – actions that eventually resulted in a strained relationship with her father, Saul. The psalm of lament (Psalm 59) refers to the story of David's escape from Saul and is broken into four distinct parts:

- a prayer for deliverance
- a confident hope
- a renewed prayer for deliverance, and
- a renewed hope

The author uses the repetition of the phrase "deliver me" as a mechanism to emphasize meaning around bringing one out of trouble and distress. David made other significant decisions as well, such as fleeing and seeking help from Samuel at Ramah (1 Samuel 19:18) and not being present at dinner with the king:

And David said to Jonathan, "Indeed tomorrow is the New Moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go, that I may hide in the field until the third day at evening" (1 Samuel 20:5).

Later, David decided to flee to Gath (1 Samuel 21:10) and then to the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1). Even though Saul was focused on killing David, the future King made the choice numerous times to spare Saul's life out of humility for his own station in life, referential respect for the authority and office of the monarch, and the internal guidance of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, Samuel, Saul, and his three sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua (1 Samuel 31: 2-9) all die, and David begins his reign as king. Other examples of decisions David made in Second Samuel included stripping his first wife Michal back from her new husband Paltiel, son of Laish, sending him home heartbroken. Unsurprisingly, David and Michal's reunion was far from pleasant, as he was no longer the young courageous warrior who served her father's household, but rather a monarch with absolute power. Furthermore, she would now have to compete with six other women for King David's attention. It is worth noting that Michal's hatred had festered over the years, and she neither accepted her God-given lot nor trusted God for her future happiness — she had become bitter not only at David but also toward God.

Perhaps, one of the most prominent examples of failure in power and decision-making came from the story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah (2 Samuel 12:13). David's suffering and regret are further illustrated throughout Psalm 51. While kings of the middle-east would normally go to battle in the spring when weather was good and food abundant, David had decided to stay back in Jerusalem while he sent Joab and his army to besiege the Ammonite capital of Rabbah. Second Samuel 11:1-5 recounts the event:

Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So, David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent his messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from impurity; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so, she sent and told David, and said, "I am with child."

This decision would lead David to make a series of subsequent poor decisions such as attempting to deceive Uriah into laying with his wife, and later, facilitating Uriah's sacrifice on the battlefield. In the end, Uriah would die, and David would send for Bathsheba, and she would bear him a son. David was disappointed in himself as "the thing [he] had done displeased the Lord" (2 Samuel 11:27).

Next, this expository essay will explore the various theories of decision-making and power within the context of organizational behavior and cross-reference the theories with the actions and relationships that David forged in First and Second Samuel.

Organizational Behavior and the Books of Samuel

Konopaske, Ivancevich, and Matteson (2018, p. 7) define organizational behavior as the “study of the impact that individuals, groups, organizational structure, and processes have on behavior within organizations.” In practice, organizational behavior leans on numerous constructs of study, including sociology, psychology, politics, cultural anthropology, and science. McShane and Von Glinow (2018, p. 4) described organizations as “groups of people who work together toward some purpose.” Basically, organizational behavior is the study and praxis of what people think, feel, and do in and around organizations (Griffin, 2017; Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 2004). Organizational behavior in the United States is heavily influenced by Mega-trends – the large-scale forces and patterns that are reshaping the values, ideals, attitudes, and psychosocial constructs of its population (Aguas, 2018a). These trends continue transform the way people live their lives. According to the business consulting firm, Frost & Sullivan, mega-trends are defined as “transformative, global forces that define the future world with their far-reaching impacts on businesses, economies, societies, cultures and personal lives” (Frost & Sullivan, 2014, 2019). The mega-trends that are currently influencing organizations include:

- Globalization (Adler, 2001; Gaspar, Arreola-Risa, Bierman, et al., 2017; Northouse, 2019)
- Technology and Innovation (Gerber, 2019; Marr, 2017, 2019; Roe, 2018)
- The Continuous Shift to Knowledge Work (Aguas, 2017; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Trost, 2013)
- Environmental and Ecological Sustainability (Stofleth, 2017)
- Movement Towards the Semantic Web 3.0 (Shontell, 2011; Strickland, 2008)
- The Changing Workforce – Generational, Gender, and Cultural Differences (Aguas, 2018b; Moodian, 2009; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Toossi, 2015)

Scripture provides numerous examples of organizations and organizational activities – some functional, some dysfunctional. From God’s creation of the earth and interactions with Adam and Eve in Genesis to His warning to everyone who hears the “words of prophecy” in Revelation, organizations and organizational activities exist in abundance. The Book of Ephesians provides descriptive Scripture that highlights the importance of all individuals working together in God’s organization, collaborating towards a common purpose:

That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to effective working by which

every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:16).

This particular Scripture discusses the importance of helping the “babes” in the church organization grow to maturity. Additionally, the pericope illustrates the importance of honesty and speaking truth in the context of the church organization. Note that this Scripture advocates that there are no insignificant parts of the body: all parts of the organization are important and essential for a healthy organization to function and flourish.

First and Second Samuel interact with dozens of organizations and highlight numerous elements of organizational behavior within the story of David. One does not have to read long to find an organization “in action,” and extract relevance from scriptural lessons that can be directly applied and transferred to current world situations. The following represents examples of organizations and micro-organizations within the story of David in the Books of Samuel:

- Samuel, Jesse, and David
- The Philistines, Israelites, Ammonites, and Syrians
- The Inhabitants of Jerusalem and Bethlehem
- Samuel's sons
- David, Bathsheba, and Uriah
- Saul's army
- Jonathan, David, and Saul
- David, Bathsheba, and their sons
- David's concubines, servants, and army
- David, Michal, and Paltiel
- David and Jonathan

This list illustrates that organizations in First and Second Samuel were small and large, short- and long-term focused, and came together for both good and bad purposes. In today's world, organizations function in a relatively similar fashion. Some organizations like JPMorgan Chase employ over 250,000 employees and operate in over 100 markets worldwide, while others like Ellen's Homestyle Kitchen in Virginia Beach employ just a few in one suburban location. Relatively speaking, the United States women's national soccer team worked together for the better part of three decades to earn their fourth World Cup championship, while the Zhou Dynasty – the longest-ruling Chinese dynasty – lasted 867 years from 1122 to 255 BC. Finally, organizations such as the Red Cross and the United States Armed Forces are designed to serve and protect those that do not have the means to do so individually, while others like organized crime and “hate” groups exist to exploit and do evil. Each of these examples reflects a diverse nature of organizational life around the globe.

First and Second Samuel also parallel these organizational characteristics. For example, David assembled a large organization of 400 men who were oppressed and discontented with Saul's rule (1 Samuel 22). In contrast, a micro-organization existed in the interaction between David, Jonathan, and Saul. King David's rule lasted approximately 40 years, while the interaction with Saul and his Father Jesse was short-lived (1 Samuel 16). Finally, David joined the Israelites and represented them against the giant Goliath in a fight that would serve as a godly example of the Lord's strength, even by today's standards. On the other end of the spectrum, David's behavior as a member of the organization, which included Bathsheba and Uriah, demonstrated jaundiced judgment, disastrous decision-making, and not so fortuitous failure.

Decision-Making in the Books of Samuel

Decisions are made in order to achieve a specific result, address an opportunity, or solve a particular problem; and decision-making is "the process of choosing a particular action that deals with a problem or opportunity" (Konopaske, Ivancevich, & Matteson, 2018, p. 371). According to Griffin, Phillips, and Gully (2017), there are two different types of decisions: programmed and nonprogrammed decisions.

A programmed decision is a well-structured, recurring, and frequent decision made with information that is clear, specific, and readily available. Programmed decisions involve situations in which procedures have been developed for repetitive and routine problems. They are often dependent on formal or informal policies and procedures. The story of David discusses his role and position as a young shepherd, in that it involved many programmed decisions as he cared for the safety and welfare of his flock. Shepherds graze sheep, herd them to areas of good forage, and keep a watchful eye on poisonous plants. They bring their sheep back to bed down in the same area each night and shear their sheep in the springtime each year. Today, there is an infinite number of programmed decisions that occur daily. An assistant manager at Starbucks Coffee reviews inventory regularly to determine which supplies need to be replenished and ordered, while a bank's ATM custodian follows a specific procedure in refilling the cash trays each week. For programmed decisions, a decision rule guides decision-makers toward the alternative to choose once they have the predetermined information about the decision situation.

A nonprogrammed decision is one that "is relatively unstructured and occurs much less often than a programmed decision (Griffin, 2017). Nonprogrammed decisions are "new and unusual, vague, have major consequences, involve the upper levels of the organization, and can take a relatively long time to navigate" (Griffin, Phillip, & Gully, 2017). Nonprogrammed decisions operate under a condition of risk since the decision-maker cannot know with certainty what the outcome of a given action will be. David used nonprogramming processes when deciding to spare Saul's life twice, and when deciding to sacrifice Uriah's life on the battlefield. In both scenarios, David faced

conditions of uncertainty, where he lacked enough information to estimate the probability of possible outcomes. Konopaske, Ivancevich, and Matteson (2018) introduce an administrative decision-making model called “bounded rationality,” a methodology that assumes decision-making is not an entirely rational process, but rather one that is fraught with constraints and limitations.

The Walt Disney Company’s decision to purchase Lucasfilm, Ltd. and Pixar Animation Studios are both examples of nonprogrammed decisions. So was Amazon.com Inc’s acquisition of Whole Foods Market. Although the concept of mergers and acquisitions are all too common in today’s society, these large-scale transactions are rarely similar and often differ in both structure and execution. As organizations consider entering new global terrain or producing state-of-the-art innovation and technology, they often exercise nonprogramming decision-making with bounded rationality.

Theories of Power in the Books of Samuel

From a leadership perspective, Yukl (2013, p. 186) defines power as “the absolute capacity of an individual agent to influence the behavior or attitudes of one or more designated target persons at a given point in time” and posits that the construct of power is useful for understanding how people are able to influence each other in organizations. Northouse (2019) and Antonakis and Day (2018) also believe that the concept of power is closely related to leadership due to its contribution to the influence process. In essence, leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2019, p. 5).

The story of David in First and Second Samuel illustrates examples of two types of power: positional and personal power. Bass (2008) claims that the status associated with one’s position gives one power to influence those who are in a lower status. This is called “positional power.” According to Bass, “traditions, rules, and regulations assign power to incumbents of positions” (p. 267), who then have the authority to issue rewards and punishments. Personal power is the “ability to affect others’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors without using force or formal authority” (Gill, 2011, p. 268). Personal power is a source of influence and authority a person has over his or her followers, determined by his or her followers. Northouse (2019) further sets forth six bases of power propounded by French and Raven (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 2004) and explains their categorization into two familial groupings: position and personal power. Table 1 illustrates these two types of power and their related bases along with a source definition and an example of the construct from First and Second Samuel.

Table 1

Types and Bases of Power

Position Power	Source	Examples from the Books of Samuel
Legitimate	Associated with having status or formal job authority.	Both King Saul and King David had the formal authority to give their armies orders. David used his formal authority to demand that Bathsheba be brought to him.
Reward	Derived from having the capacity to provide rewards to others.	King Saul gave David his daughter Michal as a reward for killing numerous Philistines
Coercive	Derived from having the capacity to penalize or punish others.	David ordered Uriah to be placed on the front line of the battle. He was killed as a result of his loyalty to David and his soldiers. He chose not to lay with his wife when David called him back from the war.
Information	Derived from possessing knowledge that others want or need.	David's knowledge and ability to play the harp calmed King Saul's distressed spirit.
Personal Power		
Referent	Based on followers' identification and liking for the leader.	David was adored by the Israelites, Jonathan, and even Saul for a short time.
Expert	Based on followers' perceptions of the leader's competence.	Nathan was a court prophet who wrote about the histories of David and Solomon. As a Shepherd, David learned how to hurl stones to protect his flock. He used this expert knowledge and skill to kill Goliath.

Note. Adapted from *A force for change: How leadership differs from management* (pp. 3-8), by J. P. Kotter, 1990, New York, NY: Free Press.

Today, the six bases of power can be observed through a variety of examples. For instance, legitimate power is expressed throughout the military as senior leaders lead their teams through exercises and in combat. In the courtroom, a judge has the formal authority to sentence an individual to a specific jail term or to set the appropriate bail amount – a form of legitimate power. Parents who provide a monetary incentive or video game time in exchange for good grades in school are demonstrating reward power. On the other hand, a high school coach who benches his or her star player for poor performance in practice is demonstrating coercive power. A university department dean who has new criteria for promotion has information power, while a

tour guide at Universal Studios Hollywood possesses expert power when providing tours to park guests each day. Finally, referent power can be seen in mentors and teachers who are adored and admired by their mentees and students.

Conclusion

The story of King David provides numerous teachings and learnings in organizational behavior and organizational effectiveness, particularly in relation to behavioral theories of decision-making and power. David's story educates today's decision-makers and helps them understand the elements and obstacles involved in effective decision-making and their potential results. With this understanding, decision-makers and influencers become cognizant of whether they have the required information to make programmed or nonprogrammed decisions, the latter of which may require a bounded rationality approach. Leveraging the learnings from David's experiences with an understanding of the shaping forces known as mega-trends provides decision-makers with a menu of power types and bases from which to choose and appropriately utilize in various situations. In the end, today's leaders can improve their effectiveness as they seek to increase followership satisfaction and the employee experience while leading their teams towards accomplishing organizational objectives.

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