

The leadership style of king david essay sample

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



Take one leader in the Bible, other than Jesus, and evaluate his or her leadership style from using the framework of modern thinking on leadership and your own theological reflection.

Introduction

In her book "Leadership Can Be Taught", Sharon Parks (2005, p. 3.) suggests that the study of leadership is "important for the common good" in today's "complex changing world". The term "complex changing world" could easily be used to describe the time covered by the early years of King David as described in 1 Samuel chapter 16 to 2 Samuel chapter 5, and 1 Chronicles chapter 11. This was the beginning of a turbulent Kingship for a dichotomous Israel, at a time of continual external agitation from their enemies. It was a time in which the type of leadership would determine the success or failure of the fledgling nation of Israel. Utilising contemporary leadership theory, this paper will analyse the leadership of David in his "wilderness years" whilst running from King Saul, particularly examining the way he led and influenced a group made of societies outcasts into a team. From this team some of these "discontented debtors" (1 Samuel 22: 2) would forever be known among "David's mighty men" (2 Samuel 23: 8 - 39).

Dumbrell (2002, p. 86) describes these years of David's life as time of "waiting patiently", but on examination of Scripture these appear to show David in a time of great personal testing and tempering. This time was a time of God preparing Israel's new King (Damazio, 1988, p. 134), and a period of God "removing David's crutches" (Swindoll, 1997, pp 62-69). This

season of preparation is a critical step between a leader's call, and the leader's release into the fully matured functional leadership role (Damazio, 1988, pp. 131-134). To analyse David's leadership style during this time, this paper will firstly look briefly at the biblical account of David's fleeing from King Saul.

Overview of the Wilderness Years

In the preceding chapters to 1 Samuel 20, David has been accepted into the King's service, and has proved to be an exceptional army leader. David's leadership over Saul's troops is described as very task oriented. The focus of the accounts of David's battles in chapter 18 focus very much on the success of David, and the accolades he received from his fellow Israelites. The theme centers upon the completion of the task and the rewards. David was then forced to flee King Saul, who had previously tried to kill David while he was in the King's service by various means including throwing spears at him, sending him into an unsurvivable battle, and commanding others to kill him. Klien (1983, p. 210.) asserts that at no time up to now had David been either disloyal to King Saul or acted out of self-interest.

In Chapter 20, David flees after being warned to go by the King's son, Jonathon. He seeks food and weapons from the priest Ahimelech, lying to him by saying that he was with others on special King's business. David noticed Doeg the Edomite there, and even though he knew that he would tell Saul that he had seen David being assisted by Ahimelech, he focuses on his own needs, ignoring the possible ramifications - a common flaw of visionary leaders (Conger, 1990, pp. 44-46). This lie results in not only the murder of

Ahimelech and his family, but also the murder of all priests and their families living in Nob. The only survivor was the priest Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech. David later (ch22, v33) takes responsibility for their deaths. This moral failure is most likely motivated by the circumstances he is in, rather than a deeper character flaw. These motivational circumstances include loneliness and seclusion, stress, isolation from all forms of accountability and emotional support, lack of relationship with God, and a lack of meaningful relationships from within his previous followers (Whetnam and Whetnam. pp. 16-21, 35, 47-51, 55).

In 1 Samuel 22 David is hiding in the cave of Adullam, fearing for his life, uncertain of how he was going to get out of his current situation (c. f. Psalms 57 & 142). He was in such fear for his own safety that he sends his family (who have joined him) to the land of Moab. Verse three outlines the start of the forming of David's band of miscreants; " Also joining him was every person who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. He became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him" (NKJV). David is now the leader of an unstructured group of men discontented with the current political situation.

They had been wronged and mistreated, were under a curse of debt that they could not pay. They were not trained loyal soldiers, but like David, are so distressed that they have no option left except to run and hide from their problems (Swindoll, 1997, p. 74; Epp, 1965, p. 56). Psalm 57 indicates that not only were they hiding, but they were angry and wanting vengeance on

those they felt had wronged them. Keller (1985, pp. 120, 121) suggests that it was in living with these oppressed outcasts that David developed his compassion for those living under oppression.

Chapter 23 starts with an acclamation of the transformation that David's band of miscreant had undergone. It appears that David had been training his men into an army of soldiers, and although they had little faith in their own abilities as warriors, they had faith in David as a leader. When he said that they could overthrow the Philistines at Keilah, David's army (now numbering 600) even followed him into what they believed was an impossible battle. When God tells David that his fellow Israelites, the inhabitants of Keilah, will betray him and his men to Saul even after they had liberated the city from the Philistines, David demonstrates to his men his determination to act righteously by not attacking his own people. He shows the same righteousness towards the Israelites of Ziph when they also betray him to Saul. In these acts David demonstrated self denial for the purpose of a greater good. He perceived the residents of these cities not as enemies, but as some of his own people whom he will one day govern and form into a mighty cohesive nation.

David next demonstrates integrity to his men while hiding from Saul in a cave at the Rocks of the Wild Goats, when Saul enters the cave to relieve himself. David's men urge him to kill Saul, but David refuses to "stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed" (1 Samuel 24: 6; 26: 9, 11), and instead secretly cuts off the corner of Saul's robe as proof to Saul that he intends him no harm and has no animosity toward him. David demonstrates

the same integrity at the hill of Hachilah (1 Samuel chapter 26) when he enters Saul's camp by night and steals his spear and water jug. In this instance David invites Abishai (who would later be counted among the mighty men) to go with him on this risky venture.

The dedication of David's men was tested at Ziklag, when they spoke of killing him in retribution for their families and possessions being taken captive by the Amalekites. The men blamed David as their leader for failing to provide the proper protection (Klein, 1983, p. 281, 282), but after David sought God through an oracle provided by Abiathar, the men rallied behind him again as their leader to fight the Amalekites. In this instance the dedication that David had engendered from his men was apparent, that even in their grief and anger, they trusted the judgement and leadership of David enough to put their own immediate feelings aside to work for a greater good. After the positive result from this attack on the Amalekites, David demonstrated a degree of fairness in the distribution of the spoils of war. He recognised the integral part played by all members of his army. Acting ethically, he ensures that those who stayed behind at Brook Besor due to exhaustion received an equal share with those who were directly involved in the fighting.

Leadership Style

How can these accounts of David's "wilderness years" be categorised into a leadership style? Northouse describes two behavioural dimensions of leadership style as being task, and relationship (Northouse, 2007, p. 69); being whether the leader is focussed on the needs of the people or the

completion of the task. The behavioural dimensions of leadership can be evaluated on a Managerial Grid such as the one devised by Blake and Moulton (Northouse, 2007, p. 74). For the purpose of this study, the evaluation of David will start with plotting his behavioural style on a Managerial Grid to determine his level of task versus people focus.

CONCERN FOR RESULTS

Key To Chart

A - David leads Saul's troops.

B - David lies to Ahimelech.

C - David attacks the Philistines at Keilah.

D - David leaves the people of Keilah and Ziph in peace.

E - David takes Abishai with him into Saul's camp.

F - David fights the Philistines, leaving Ziklag undefended.

G - David fights the Amalekites and distributes spoils of war fairly.

Utilising the style questionnaire in Northouse (2007, p. 86), charting points were assigned to the junctures of David's pre-kingship life and plotted on the "Results vs. People" axis of the Managerial grid in figure 1. As the finer details of David's exploits are not covered, only a limited number of questions could be effectively utilised. From evaluating the grid, it could first be assumed that David was an opportunistic leader, utilising whatever

style of leadership would best fulfil his personal needs (Northouse, 2007, pp. 75, 76). If the data is evaluated in respect to time, it can be seen that David moves from “ authority - compliance” (9, 2) style of leadership to a style that reflects a greater concern for people; then on to what Blake et al (discussed in Northouse, 2007, p. 75) terms as “ team management”. This style reflects participation, openness, clear priorities, commitment to the task and the people, and a following through with actions. The exception in this timeline is the instance when David fails to adequately protect the families of his troops residing in Ziklag; a matter that he soon rectifies.

This style of evaluation is a useful tool in quantifying David’s leadership, as it gives a broad understanding of his leadership in relation to his followers. It also allows visibility in how that relationship develops from task orientation to a balance of task and people orientation over time. This data gives reasonable refute to Dumbrell’s earlier assertion that this period was merely a time of David “ waiting patiently”. The investigation of style alone however, fails to adequately qualify David’s leadership style in association with performance outcomes such as morale, follower satisfaction, and follower growth and goal achievement (Northouse, 2007, pp. 79, 88). To ascertain this qualification, of leader influence over follower growth, the theories of Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX), Transactional Leadership, and Transformational Leadership will be utilised. There is not enough data available to utilise a psychodynamic approach to determine a consistent pattern of acting in regard to David’s continually changing environment.

LMX theory utilises the recognition and classification of dyadic relationships between leader and the individuals in the group of followers into one of two groups. These groups are called the “in group” and the “out-group”. Did David have a select group with which he had special dyadic relationships? The fact that some of the men recorded as being with David in his are later part of the select group of “mighty men” who “strengthened themselves with him [David] in his kingdom” (1 Chronicles 11: 10) suggests that there was such a group. This is further reinforced by the conversation and resultant action between David, Ahimelech, and Abishai (1 Samuel 26: 6-12); where David invites them to go with him to Saul’s camp, and Abishai, who is one of the “mighty men”, accepts the challenge to risk his life with his leader. The depth of that dyadic relationship can later be observed when Abishai risks his own life to defend David against Goliath’s brother (2 Samuel 21: 17).

Transactional and transformational leadership behaviour are two facets of leadership style which address the way in which the leader interacts with their followers (Bass and Avolio, 1990, p.; 1995, p.; Northouse, 2007, p. 176). Transactional leaders utilise an approach of creating fair exchange relationships with their subordinates by identifying their needs and offering exchange rewards for acceptable results. This cannot be seen in the leadership of David, as when the outcasts joined him initially in the cave he had no rewards to offer, and there is no evidence of management-by-exception.. Transformational leadership goes beyond transactions and improves followers’ commitment by influencing their needs, values, and self-esteem; treating them holistically.

An indicative result is followers achieving more than what would have been expected of them (Northouse, 2007, pp. 175, 176). The transformational approach raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and follower, and is characterised by a leader with strong moral standards who transcends their own self interest for the greater good. The behaviours of the transformational leader can be classified into four dimensions: idealised influence / charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass and Avolio 1995, p.; Northouse pp. 181-184). To determine if David was a transformational leader, his actions will be characterised against these four dimensions.

Idealised Influence / Charisma

David demonstrated to his followers a high standard of moral and ethical values which transcended his own needs for a greater good. This can be seen in the sparing of Saul's life (twice), the protecting of Keilah from raiders with no promise of reward, leaving the betrayal by the citizens of Keilah and Ziph unavenged, and in ensuring that the spoils of war from the battle with the Amalekites was fairly distributed.

Inspirational Motivation (IM).

In leading his men to attack the Philistines at Keilah, when they were afraid to even leave the seclusion of their hiding place, is a demonstration of David's IM. David has sought an answer from God, and has used that answer to motivate the troops into action, resulting in them achieving more than they had ever expected. An expected result of IM is that followers move

beyond their own self-interest for the benefit of the greater good (Northouse, 2007, p. 183. 184). This is seen in the men following David into battle again against the Amalekites rather than act out of their own anger, Looking at the murder of Abner at the hands of David's "mighty men" Joab and Abishai (2 Samuel 3: 30) casts doubt upon any lasting effect of such moral change, although there is no record of Joab, the one who actually committed the murder, ever having been in David's "boot camp" in the wilderness.

Intellectual Stimulation

During his wilderness years, there is not a great deal of data available that supports innovation. This would be partially due to the ethnic constraints that typify a monarchically lead country, as well as being due to the cultural trait of uncertainty avoidance of middle-eastern cultures (Northouse, 2007, pp. 306, 312). Reading of 2 Samuel chapter 23 and 1 Chronicles Chapter 19 records that later in David's rein his "mighty men", being leaders of troops fought innovatively.

Individualised Consideration

In taking Abishai with him into Saul's camp, and in regarding the needs of those left behind at Brook Besor, David demonstrated individualised consideration.

In consideration of the criteria so far discussed, David's leadership during his "wilderness years" can be seen as one of progression; taking a quantum leap from a leadership style that appears results oriented and monarchical, to a transactional one that (generally) shows a balance between results and

people. This is demonstrated in his band of outcasts performing beyond what anyone, including themselves would have expected. In his dyadic relationships, David utilised LMX to build into the lives of a select teachable few who would reflect his potential (Maxwell, 1998, pp. 109-119), thereby effectively reproducing himself as a leader and a “giant killer”; a trait that Maxwell (1998, pp. 133-141) identifies as one of the “laws of leadership”. David’s moral standards, although not perfect, were such that they provided a positive influence to his followers and challenged them to change their ideals.

After learning at Nob the importance of seeking the Lord in all decisions, David made habit of keeping God at the center of his decision making, and checking these spiritually based decisions with Abiathar; thereby not only seeking God, but also seeking the wise counsel of another who can also hold him accountable. This combination would act as a combatant against further moral failure (Whetham and Whetham, pp. 16-21, 35, 87-93). It is easy to look at David’s failings and wonder how God saw a “man after His own heart”; but when the change of heart that David went through and the way in which He allowed his leadership to be “God lead” and morally based is considered, it is easy to see why David is often seen as one of Israel’s greatest leaders.

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Concern for People

The fact that not one of his previous followers recognised the unwarranted persecution by Saul and came to his aid shows a lack of personal relationship building - see data point A on Figure 1.

C. f. Psalm 57: 4 My soul is among lions; I lie among the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.