

Machiavelli and odysseus

Profession, Writer



Power and Leadership The Connection of Power and Leadership between The Odyssey and The Prince Research Assignment Stories in Diverse Media LAPS/HUMA 1780 Prepared for: Dr. Gillian Helfield Mr. Julian Manyoni Prepared by: Samuel James Ysip 212-697-983 Power and Leadership Power and leadership play a big role in accomplishing the objectives of a team. A person having these two attributes can direct a group of people towards achieving their common goal. These two components of authority are also essential to each other in order for the leader to be successful.

Power is a person's ability to influence others and leadership is a person's talent to guide a group of people to achieve their common goal. A person that has power but without the capacity to make the right decisions for the team will definitely fail to lead a team to their goal and a person without the influence on others but with the talent to lead a team will sure not be able to implement the qualities of a great leader to a group. Homer's The Odyssey and Machiavelli's The Prince are two books that both contain themes about power and leadership.

Homer's The Odyssey contains information about Odysseus' leadership capabilities during his journey home to Ithaca and how he reacted on different situations that involve critical leadership decisions. It also contains the status of his leadership in his homeland and what kind of monarchy he has. On the other hand, Machiavelli's The Prince gives out information and guidelines on what a Machiavellian leader should be and how he should react in different kinds of situations. It also contains different theories on how the structure of a monarchy affects a king's superiority in his own kingdom. Throughout Odysseus' journey, he made questionable decisions that

contradict the teachings of Machiavelli. By not following the guidelines of Machiavelli on leadership and power management, as a result, Odysseus failed to lead his team safely back to Ithaca. Through Machiavelli's theory, one could also argue that because of the structure of Odysseus' kingdom in Ithaca, it resulted to the noble men in Achaea to take advantage of his absence, thus resulting to the exploitation of his land.

The disobedience of Odysseus' crew members to his orders resulting to their death, the act of contempt of Eurylochus against Odysseus and the effects of political structure in Ithaca to Odysseus' supremacy as king are the three factors that constitute the power and leadership issues in *The Odyssey* which are connectedly criticized and discussed through the guidelines and theories of Machiavelli in *The Prince*. The disobedience of Odysseus crew members to his order of not eating the cattle of Helios which resulted to their death is the outcome of Odysseus' failure to apply the teaching of Machiavelli about being compassionate or cruel.

In chapter seventeen of *The Prince*, Machiavelli stated that, "A ruler mustn't worry about being labelled cruel when it's a question of keeping his subjects loyal and united . . . he will prove more compassionate than the leader whose excessive compassion leads to public disorder, muggings and murder." (65). Odysseus' compassion towards Eurylochus; a high ranking crew member that insults him and constantly tries to lure Odysseus' crew members to disobey his orders, resulted to the death of the crew members and further delayed his return to Ithaca.

Eurylochus' exploitations in the story began to develop when they arrived at the island of Aea. Eurylochus disagreed with Odysseus' decision to go

back to Circes palace to have his men rest after a long travel. He then insulted Odysseus by saying, " So too it happened with the Cyclops, when our companions went into his yard, and the bold Odysseus was of their company; for it was by this man's recklessness that these too perished. " (10. 435-438). These two incidents alone have enough grounds for Odysseus to take actions on Eurylochus' obvious disregard of his authority.

Odysseus considered killing him by taking his head off but he realized that he is related to Eurylochus by marriage and his men were also able to stop him by pleading to him. This confrontation is an evidence of Odysseus showing incorrect compassion towards Eurylochus. Although Odysseus showed a sign of disappointment, he never really punished him which led to more disobedience by Eurylochus. It also showed that he considers his men's view of his actions. His actions confirmed that he would rather show compassion than cruelty by being stopped by his men from killing Eurylochus through their pleading.

By not taking the necessary actions on Eurylochus' behaviour, he was able to persuade Odysseus to land on the island of Thrinakia where Helios keeps his cattle despite Circes advice to stay away from Helios' belongings. When they landed on the Island where the cattle are, Eurylochus again stirred up trouble by persuading the crew members that it's fine to eat the cattle of Helios while Odysseus was asleep. Eurylochus said, ". . . hunger is the sorriest way to die and encounter fate . . . let us cut out the best of Helios cattle and sacrifice them to the immortals who hold wide heaven . . . and if we ever come back to Ithaca . . . we will build a rich temple to the Sun God Helios. " (12. 342-346). This final incident that Eurylochus was able stir up

became the main reason of the crew members' death and also Eurylochus. Odysseus should have made the right decision of eliminating Eurylochus when he first started to disregard his superiority on the Island of Aea. Odysseus also showed a sign weakness in his leadership when Eurylochus was able to persuade him to land on an island where the temptations are apparent despite the group and Eurylochus' constant disobedience and the crew's inability to avoid temptation.

In the book Machiavelli on Modern Leadership, Michael A. Leeden stated that " Without fear of punishment, men will not obey laws that force them to act contrary to their passions. " (115). Odysseus' lack of implementing punishment to his subjects made his crew men, particularly Eurylochus, more attracted to temptations and more convenient of violating not only Odysseus' orders but also the gods'. Leeden also stated in his book that " to be an effective leader, the most prudent method is to ensure that your people are afraid of you.

To instill that fear, you must demonstrate that those who attack you will not survive. " (126). This statement criticises Odysseus response to Eurylochus' disobedience. Eurylochus challenged and ridiculed Odysseus' leadership and authority during their stay on the island of Aea. He also questioned Odysseus decision of not wanting to land on the island of Thrinakia although he was able to persuade him anyway. Odysseus failed to respond with effective force on these incidents which resulted to more disobedience. The system of uthority that Odysseus implemented over his subjects during their journey resulted to his men's downfall and also his. By not applying the teachings of Machiavelli on how a leader should use power to appropriately

perform cruelty or compassion to achieve a better and more disciplined kingdom, Odysseus showed unnecessary compassion to the wrong person; a sign of a weak leadership, thus resulting to the death of his whole crew and further delayed his return to Ithaca. Odysseus' leadership flaws do not stop on his lack of control over his subjects.

He also made terrible judgements that led to the death of some of his companions that consequently resulted to the loss of their trust to his leadership. Because of these bad decisions, Eurylochus; Odysseus' second in command, found the courage to challenge his leadership. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli stated that, ". . . when there is no threat from outside, a ruler must take care that his subjects don't start conspiring against him. He can guard against this by making sure he isn't hated or despised and that people are happy with him" (73).

One reason of Eurylochus' voice of displeasure with Odysseus' leadership is because of Odysseus' foolishness and stubbornness. On the Island of Cyclopes before Odysseus took his men to the cave, he stated that " my proud heart had an idea that presently I would encounter a man who was endowed with great strength, and wild, with no true knowledge of laws or any good customs. " (9. 213-215). On their way to the Cyclops' cave, Odysseus knew himself that danger is on their way yet he still made careless decisions when they get there.

Instead of quickly taking all the things they needed inside the cave and despite his men's persuasions, he still decided to wait for Polyphemus to arrive because he personally wanted to try his luck if the Cyclops would actually welcome them inside. Odysseus stated that " From the start my

companions spoke to me and begged me to take some of the cheeses, come back again, and the next time to drive the lambs and kids from their pens, . . . but I would not listen to them . . . not until I could see him, see if he would give me presents. " (9. 224-229).

The fact that Odysseus is a known tactician, one could argue that his companions' simple strategy is far much better than Odysseus naive idea of trying his luck with the Cyclops. Although Odysseus' cunning got him out of the cave after getting trapped, the consequences of his foolish curiosity in regard to the death of his comrades and the loss of trust of his comrades, outweigh the benefits of his cunning. Odysseus stubbornness and foolishness led to the death of six of his men and this gave Eurylochus one of the reasons to go against his authority.

The incident on their way out of Island of the Cyclopes also added fuel to the fire when Odysseus provoked Polyphemus by shouting to him. His crew members yet again pleaded to him, " Hard one, why are you trying once more to stir up this savage man . . ." (9. 494-495). They also mentioned that because of Odysseus' provocative actions, the Cyclops threw big rocks at them and led the ship back to the shore and almost got them caught and get killed. This declaration by his crew members is a sign of their disappointment with Odysseus' leadership.

It shows that they are concerned with how Odysseus constantly putting them in harm's way by being out of control. Another sign of their dissatisfaction is when the notion of unfairness came into their minds when they foolishly opened the bag of wind that sent them back to Aeolian Island. His companions stated that Odysseus " is bringing home with him handsome

treasures . . . while we, who have gone through everything he has on the same venture, come home with our hands empty. " (10. 40-43).

This action by the crew members shows a symptom of mutiny against a leader that is supposed be trusted and respected by his subjects. It also signifies that Odysseus has lost his connection with his crew men and they don't see him anymore as one of them. In an article by Elihu Rose, he claimed that " Mutiny begins with grievances over some existing or threatened condition. The question then may be posed as to whether those grievances, legitimate or not, were ultimately addressed and, if so, to what degree . . . " (572).

This statement supports the idea that mutiny is indeed the result of lack of acknowledgement by the people who are responsible to address the internal issues of an organization. It applies to Odysseus' constant disregard of his crew members' pleadings which resulted to him putting his crew members into situations that they didn't wish to go through. According to Machiavelli, ". . . one of the most powerful preventive measures against conspiracies is simply not being hated by majority of people. People planning a conspiracy must believe that killing the ruler will be popular . . ." Eurylochus knew the disappointment of the crew members on Odysseus' leadership. This gave him the further courage to voice out his displeasure on Odysseus' authority knowing that the crew members also have an issue with the way Odysseus handled situations. It also gave him the courage and the capability to persuade the crew members to disobey Odysseus' orders of not eating the cattle of Helios. Machiavelli's advice to a king of keeping his subjects

satisfied or simply not despise him to avoid contempt or mutiny certainly didn't apply to Odysseus leadership.

The stubbornness of Odysseus along with his inability to create a cohesive relationship among his crew resulted into disappointment inside his circle which paved the way for Eurylochus to contempt against his authority. Lastly, the capability of the noble men to threaten his throne and exploit his belongings could be argued as the result of the political structure of Odysseus' kingdom. Chapter four of *The Prince* discusses the advantages of appointing ministers and the disadvantages of a kingdom with nobles.

Machiavelli stated that, " These barons have their own lands and their own subjects who recognize the barons as their masters and are naturally loyal to them. Where a state is governed by a king and his ministers the king is more powerful since he is the only person in the state whom people recognize as superior. When they obey someone else it is only because he is minister or official and they have no specialloyaltyto him" (16). In other words, Machiavelli suggests that because the nobles have their own power inside a king's monarchy, they're more likely to disobey or be mutinous against a king's authority.

On the other hand, a monarchy that has ministers instead of barons, gives the king the security of not having any defiance against his superiority. In *The Odyssey*, Achaea is a land filled nobles. It is known in the story that Odysseus did not appoint any ministers or any sort of authority to secure his throne in Ithaca from any threats while he is gone to war. This signifies that his power over the people of Ithaca is not absolute or in other words, the foundation of his power is fragile once a certain threat to his power comes in.

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli claimed that the nobles are more likely to be corrupted by foreign forces because they are hard to please and are always eager for a change in leadership. This suggests that even if Odysseus came back to Ithaca on time, his authority is not secured from any internal or external forces (e. g. the nobles or other kings) that wanted to challenge it and much more worst if he actually have died in the war. In *The Odyssey*, Telemachus stated that, “ It is not bad to be a king . . . in fact there are many other Achaian princes, young and old, in sea girt Ithaca, any of who might hold this position, now hat the great Odysseus has perished. ” (1. 393-396). This statement by Telemachus; son of Odysseus, is a confirmation that Odysseus throne is in fact open for any internal or external forces (i. e. suitors Inside or outside of Ithaca) to occupy without any prohibition. According to Machiavelli, “. . . there will always be barons ready to assume authority when circumstances swing their way . . . ” (18). Odysseus’ absence in Ithaca and the inexistence of authority gave the noblemen the chance to do whatever they want in his land, consequently giving the noble men their chance to finally occupy his throne.

An example of this is the persistence of the Achaean noble men to take his throne by marrying his wife; Penelope, despite her obvious intension of not wanting to marry. Another result of lack of authority in Ithaca is the constant abuse of his property in the hands of the noble men by uncontrollably devouring his livestock and wine. Although Telemachus tried to appeal to the suitors by holding an assembly with all the suitors and the Achean elders, it was not enough to get the suitors out of his land. Telemachus stated that “

We have no man here such as Odysseus was, to drive this curse from the household.

We ourselves are not the men to do it . . . not men well seasoned in battle. ” (2. 58-61). Although Telemachus has the right to be aggravated with the suitors’ spoilage of his belongings, there is no authority or power in his kingdom beyond his capability that could demand the suitors out of his land. Without Odysseus, the noblemen hold the power on the land and are pretty much entitled to enforce their own rules. In the book Greek Political Thought by Ryan Balot, he stated that, “ Odysseus was like a father to his people who protected them from foreign enemies, from less restrained aristocrats . . . When Odysseus left Ithaca, everything went downhill, because of the greed and hubris of wealthy well-born men without a sense of decency . . . Meanwhile, the political community could exert some - though not enough - pressure on these aristocrats to amend their behaviour. . . as long as Odysseus was gone, those who would normally have been in charge were left with pious hopes that the gods would rescue them. Therefore . . . the well being of Ithaca depended on Odysseus return and his forcible reassertion of his power. ” (32).

This statement by Balot supports the argument that the inexistence of ministers who play as the second in command of the king makes the monarchy vulnerable not only from the nobles but also from external threats. Without the authority of appointed ministers who play as the second in command of the king, it makes the noble suitors subsequent to Odysseus in the hierarchy of power in Ithaca. With the little gap between the powers of a

king and noblemen, it makes it easier for the noblemen to enforce their authority in a kingdom when the power of a king is inexistent.

Balot's view of the situation in Ithaca also supports the idea that Odysseus' authority in his kingdom is not supreme amongst all the people under his authority and it is just a matter of chance before the noblemen defy him. Machiavelli's theory about the advantages of ministers and the disadvantages of having noblemen in a monarchy certainly applies to the structure of Odysseus' monarchy. With the kind of monarchy that Ithaca has, Odysseus' superiority in his land is undeniably vulnerable from the defiance of the ambitious and opportunistic noblemen.

The inexistence of legitimate authorities like the ministers who play as the second in command of the king to provide governance all over the land and also as the king's safeguard from any mutiny makes the supremacy of Odysseus as a king of Ithaca questionable. A leader's utilization of both power and leadership is the sole reason for an organization to succeed or fail. A leader that lacks either one of these elements is most likely to fail on directing a group to achieve the group's common objective including the leader's own personal goal.

The issues of power and leadership throughout Odysseus journey in The Odyssey are linked to the ideologies and guidelines of Machiavelli's The Prince on how a king can efficiently apply his power and leadership to maintain a well-organized and successful monarchy and what kinds of circumstances can affect a king's supremacy to his own kingdom. Throughout Odysseus journey, he showed manners of leadership that

contradicted the guidelines of Machiavelli of how a king should react in different situations that involve a critical leadership decisions.

Odysseus' too much compassion towards his crew members contradicts the advice of Machiavelli on why it is better for the leader to be feared than loved. His inappropriate compassion towards his crew members led to their rebellion against his authority which consequently led to their own destruction. Odysseus perhaps wanted to be viewed as a compassionate leader, therefore loved by his people, instead of being viewed as a cruel but effective dictator. But according to Leeden " Indeed, if you are feared, your followers will always find reasons to love you. "(128).

Odysseus recklessness also resulted to the contempt of his second in command, Eurylochus. Machiavelli stated that a king should have the characteristics of both fox and lion to avoid traps and scare out enemies. Although there is no doubt that Odysseus is a courageous warrior and at the same time cunning, he showed at times that he only utilizes the qualities of a lion but lacks or disregards the qualities of a fox, thus resulting to his crew members frustration of his actions. An example is when he courageously waited for Polyphemus despite knowing the fact that he's an unlawful monster.

Machiavelli stated that those kings that only rely on qualities of a lion have no idea what they're doing. The structure of Odysseus' monarchy is also discussed in Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Machiavelli's view on why a king is better off with a monarchy with appointed ministers than a monarchy with ruling noblemen can certainly be applied to the struggle of power in his land, Ithaca. The situation in Ithaca proves that Machiavelli's view on the <https://assignbuster.com/machiavelli-and-odysseus/>

importance of ministers and the disadvantages of having noble family in a monarchy is accurate.

These issues of power and leadership in *The Odyssey* created the consequences that plagued Odysseus, his crewmen and his wife and son throughout the story. The rebellion of his crewmembers is the result of Odysseus' failure to apply an efficient leadership along with his power, consequently resulting to his authority over his men to diminish as well. The effect of the political structure to Odysseus' supremacy in Ithaca is unchangeable, thus making him an inevitable victim of an unavoidable circumstance.

However, If Odysseus followed the guidelines of Machiavelli on how an ideal king should lead, Odysseus could have saved some of his crew members and achieved their ultimate common goal and that is returning to Ithaca safe and sound. Bibliography Balot, Ryan. *Greek Political Thought*. Blackwell Publishing, 2006. 32. Print. This text contains a thorough history of ancient Greek political thought. It examines different kinds of ancient text (e. g. *The Odyssey*) in order to clearly demonstrate the political thought and structure of ancient Greece during its time. It also studies the connection between politics and ethics in ancient Greece.

Part of this text studies the tendencies of the noblemen to revolt against a ruler. Balot stated that the aristocrats often sought for political connection outside a king's monarchy to gain additional political connection that could possibly help them attack their own government. It also contains Balot's view of the situation in Ithaca when Odysseus power is inexistent. Balot stated that Odysseus existence as a king is the only thing that hinders the "less-
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restrained" aristocrats from doing what they wish to do in his land. Homer. The Odyssey of Homer. Trans. Richmond Lattimore.

New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. , 1967. Print. The poem The Odyssey tells the story of Odysseus' journey back to his kingdom after the Trojan War. It describes the trials and the consequences that Odysseus had to go through through out his journey. This text relates to my essay about " Power and Leadership" because it exhibits Odysseus' leadership capabilities on different kinds of situations (e. g. Odysseus leadership in the island of the Cyclops) throughout his travel. This text is relevant to my argument because it contains incidents that required Odysseus to make leadership decisions.

An example of these incidents is when he decided to wait for the Cyclops despite his crew members' request of leaving the cave. By using these incidents in The Odyssey, it will help me apply the guidelines of Machiavelli on how a king should respond in different kinds of situations that required critical leadership decisions. Ledeen, Michael. Machiavelli on Modern Leadership. New York: Truman Talley Books and St. Martin's Griffin, 1999. 112-149. Print. This book studies the lessons of Machiavelli on leadership and how they can be applied to modern politics. Michael A.

Ledeen's personal view on the importance of Machiavellian leadership will be used as a tool to back up my claims on why the consequences that Odysseus suffered throughout his journey were the results of his leadership decisions that contradicted the guidelines of Machiavelli. In one case in the book that indicates the importance of inserting fear in the people under one's leadership, Leeden uses George Washington as an example by illustrating

how the former U. S. president used his army to control the citizens who were against the idea of paying excise tax on their liquor.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*. Trans. Tim Parks. Great Britain: Penguin Books Ltd, 2009. Print. This book by Machiavelli instructs the readers of the guidelines of how a " Prince" should lead and overcome adversaries or conflicts the Machiavellian way. It relates to my topic of " Power and Leadership" because it contains ideologies of how leaders should react or demonstrate power when threatened by internal or foreign forces. This text also discusses different circumstances that could affect a king's superiority in his kingdom.

The effect of the political structure of a king's kingdom is an example of the topics that are discussed in this text that could be applied to the circumstance of Odysseus kingdom, Ithaca. This text will be the basis of my judgement on the rights and wrongs of Odysseus' leadership. It will also be the basis of my evaluation on what Odysseus should have and should have not done on different situations throughout his travel. Rose, Elihu. " The Anatomy of Mutiny. " Sage. (1982): 572. Web. 25 Mar. 2013. ; <http://afs.sagepub.com/content/8/4/561.full.pdf>; This article by Rose studies the reasons of mutiny in the military.

It also explains the different kinds of mutinies, how the process of mutiny starts and how to end it. It also contains examples of passed mutinies from sixteenth century French monarchy. This article is essential to the argument of why Odysseus' inappropriate actions in the land of the Cyclopes have made his crewmen disappointed which led to the act of contempt of Eurylochus against him. Its explanation of how mutiny starts supports the <https://assignbuster.com/machiavelli-and-odysseus/>

argument that Odysseus' action against the will of his crewmen is the primary reason why his subordinates rebel against his authority in their journey.